

The Role of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the Improvement of Security in Borno State, Nigeria¹

Attila Gulyás²

Abstract:

The Nigerian state has been fighting Boko Haram since the establishment of the terrorist organization. Due to the equipment's poor quality, the lack of experience, and the staff shortages, the Nigerian Army could not defeat the enemy and provide a secure life for the citizens in Borno state, which is the base of Boko Haram. That was why the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) or locally known "Yan Gora" was established in 2013 by volunteer citizens. The organization's personnel consist of mainly jobless young and undereducated people with poor quality of equipment and weaponry.

As a non-state actor (NSA), CJTF has been fighting the terrorist organization along with the Nigerian Army and caused severe loss to Boko Haram while it has also been suffering from serious losses.

Besides the fight, the organization participates in different civil security activities such as security scans, body searches of individuals, protecting public buildings, and supervising checkpoints.

Although the Borno state government financially supports the organization, it covers only a small part of its budget. That is why most of the twenty-six thousand CJTF fighters are self-sufficient. The low budget and the lack of salaries can be the reason for crimes allegedly committed by the members of the CJTF.

The organization was initially considered as an important, apolitical actor to protect the communities, but it gradually transformed into a group with political connections which impact the future of the CJTF.

This paper is searching for the answer to how effective the CJTF is and the organization's vision after the defeat of Boko Haram.

Keywords:

Civilian Joint Task Force, CJTF, Boko Haram, Yan Gora, Nigeria.

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² ret. Lt. Colonel, doctoral student at the Doctoral School on Safety and Security Sciences, Óbuda University, Budapest, Hungary; ORCID: 0000-0001-5645-144X; gulyas.attila@phd.uni-obuda.hu.

"We run from Boko Haram, then our CJTF is again punishing us, where do we go?"
(Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018)

Introduction

Thousands of scholars have been studying terrorism and searching for the answers for this phenomenon, and there is rich literature dealing with the most notorious terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State and Al Qaeda or the Boko Haram. My interest has turned to the other side, and I aim to shed some light on those who fight against insurgents without significant state support to protect their communities. I intend to study and present the heroism of those young people who have grabbed sticks or machetes and chased out of their town the Boko Haram terrorists, who were armed to the teeth and have been fighting the insurgents since then. The members of the CJTF are far from saints, but they have set an example for most of us because they protect their communities with bare hands for free, without any salary or stipend.

In my study, I relied on the scientific literature and studied the Nigerian press and social media sites on a daily basis. I contacted Nigerian citizens on Twitter and Telegram channels to collect personal impressions and opinions. Those people helped me find sources but asked me to keep them incognito. Their request is acceptable because Twitter has been banned in Nigeria since this May.

Having these resources, I tried to depict an accurate, objective picture of the bright and dark side of the organization and its possible prospects.

What is Boko Haram?

This chapter focuses on the notorious terrorist organization because it is impossible to discuss the origin and the role of the Civil Joint Task Force (CJTF) without getting more profound knowledge of the Boko Haram insurgency. Although, according to some scholars, its origin reaches back decades and outside Nigeria as a Salafist movement (Thurston, 2016) (Besenyő, Mayer, 2015), others trace back its origin to Mohammed Yusuf (Umar Lawal Yusuf, 2020). The latter is widely accepted. The popular belief is that the organization was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2001-2002 in Maiduguri. The country had a democratic turn in 1999, and the population was hoping that this would eliminate corruption and raises the standard of living. At that time, a new young preacher appeared who called for the application of Islamic law and called for the people to turn away from the western way of life. He was Mohammed Yusuf. He preached that "Western education is a sin," which sounds like "Boko Haram" in the Hausa language. However, the long-awaited changes didn't occur. The people in the country were dissatisfied. This milieu was a good fertile soil for Mohammed's teachings and his radical thoughts, although he initially opposed the use of violence (Deutsche Welle, 2021). The



members of this sect guided by the Salafist ideology wanted radical cultural changes in the North-Eastern Nigeria, or perhaps Nigeria. In their opinion, the Northern part of the country was led by corrupt and false Muslims, so they wanted to introduce Sharia law and create a "pure" Islamic state (Umar Lawal Yusuf, 2020). The name given to themselves was "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad" (People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad).

Mohammed shaped his beliefs between 2001 and 2002, and he gave the following reasons for opposing western education (Umar Lawal Yusuf, 2020):

- The Darwinian Theory of evolution excluded God's divine hands in creating man and the universe as Islam holds God as the Omnipotent Creator of the Universe and all it contains.
- The concept that man originated from the monkey is against the Quranic injunction that man was created from clay.
- The concept of a spherical earth and the static sun is described in Western science books as opposed to the Quran, which says that the sun, earth, and moon move on their own.
- Banking is non-Islamic since it forbids financial transactions.
- Growing immorality of the modern secular world like mixing the sexes, semi-naked dressing, fornication, alcoholism as a product of westernization.
- He sees democracy as Haram (forbidden) and therefore non-Islamic as democracy has increased poverty, hunger, unemployment, and prostitution among the citizens.

He had a personal car and wore western clothes and mobile phones despite his beliefs. When he was confronted, he replied that such things are not only the product of Western education but the product of the knowledge of mankind, so he had the right to have them.

His movement was very popular in the North-Eastern part of the country, especially in the state of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. The sect members protested on the streets of the main cities and had daily conflicts with the security services during the demonstrations. Yusuf became very popular and, in parallel with it, poses a security risk for the Nigerian state. When the Boko Haram demonstrations were banned at the end of July of 2009, riots broke out in the city of Bauchi, spreading through Yobe, Borno, and other regions. The uproar lasted for days, and more than 300 people died in Maiduguri alone. The Nigerian government responded with large-scale police operations and violence. The police arrested Yusuf and a large number of demonstrators. According to the police spokesman, Yusuf tried to escape from the captivity on July 30, 2009, and he was shot to death. In contrast with the spokesman's statement, members of the sect reported that the police tortured him to death in captivity (Deutsche Welle, 2021).

Yusuf already earlier appointed his successor in the person of Abubakar Shekau. After killing his master, Abubakar launched a revenge campaign, a merciless Holy War against the Nigerian state. The sect members went underground and carried out attacks and suicide

attacks against police stations, military barracks, and governmental institutions. That is the point where Boko Haram as a terrorist organization was born. Over the years, they spread the fear in the region by increasingly brutal terror attacks against civilians. Since this change, more than 40,000 people have been killed and 2.3 million forced to leave their homes. In the beginning, the country leadership didn't take "Boko Haram" seriously. After the two-year bloody amuck of the terrorists, President Jonathan Goodluck declared the state of emergency in the North-Eastern part of the country and shut the borders with Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. A year later, he confessed that Boko Haram infiltrated the military, the police, and different governmental institutions. Another year later, in May, he extended the state of emergency to cover Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. Despite these provisions, Boko Haram occupied Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in 2013. The United States designated Boko Haram a terrorist organization in November 2013. Following the US declaration, the United Nations added the organization to its financial and arms embargo list. Nigeria postponed the presidential elections for six weeks in February 2015 because Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad formed a multinational joint force and began a campaign against Boko Haram.

Shekau, the leader of the terrorist organization pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015. Two months later, the organization changed its name to Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP). In November 2015, according to the Global Terrorism Index, Boko Haram had overtaken the Islamic State, the deadliest terrorist organization, because it killed 6,644 people in 2014. US intelligence reported in June 2016 a split between Abubakar Shekau and ISIS over the use of children as suicide bombers. The IS tried to oust Abubakar from his leadership role and replace him with Musab al-Barnawi, because in addition to the use of children suicide bombers, he also refused to cease the attacks against innocent Muslim civilians. From this point, the organization splintered into Boko Haram and ISWAP. However, Abubakar maintained his allegiance to the IS. Unfortunately, the media didn't make a distinction between the groups, and they were often mixed. That is one of the reasons why there are no exact numbers on the victims and the losses in connection with the organizations.

The Nigerian Army placed a three million Nairas bounty on Abu Shekau in February 2018. It was complemented with seven-million US dollars by the United States in March 2021. The first bloody chapter of Boko Haram ended with the death of the insane bloodthirsty Abubakar Shekau on 20 May 2021 (Channels Television Abuja, 2021). After the death of their leader, the Boko Haram fighters in June 2021 released a 13-minute-long video in which Boko Haram, and ISWAP factions reunite and pledge allegiance to Aba Ibrahim Al-Hashimiyil AlKhuraishi, whom they considered as "Khalifan Muslimai", translated as "The Leader of all Muslims" (PRNigeria, 2021). Abu Musab al-Barnawi, in a voice message on 25 June 2021, accepted the declaration of allegiance of the Boko Haram fighters (Musab al-Barnawi, 2021).



Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

The federal government tried to solve the Boko Haram crisis with various strategies, from the amnesty to the declaration of the state of emergency, not to mention the different counterterrorism measures to root out the organization from the country (Bamidele, 2016). Meanwhile, the terrorist activity was far beyond the possibility of the amnesty offered by the government. Moreover, Abubakar Shekau answered that they did not need amnesty because they didn't do any wrong. During the negotiations, Shekau vowed to stop the violence to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria. After the failed negotiations, Boko Haram killed hundreds of people, including police officers, in a short period in 2013 June in the North-Eastern part of the country. Boko Haram occupied Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state. Obviously, the negotiations and the declaration of the state of emergency didn't achieve their desired effects. The counterterrorism measures and actions seemed to fail because the security forces had not enough intelligence, they didn't know the local languages (in Borno state, there are 26 registered languages), the terrain, the customs, the leaders of the local communities. Their actions often lead to forced interrogations, torture of innocent people, and extrajudicial killings (Bamidele, 2016).

There was a gap between the local communities and the security forces to fill or bridge this gap militia groups emerged to augment the Nigerian military responses to the militant Boko Haram. These groups are known as the Yan Gora (Civilian Joint Task Force), Kungiyar Maharba (Hunters), and the Yan Banga (Vigilantes). The Hunters and the Vigilantes deserve to be presented in some sentences for the readers before the role of the CJTF is discussed in detail. The history of the Hunters looks back to hundred years. They professionally hunted for animals for their livelihood and sold their prey. They also maintained the security of the local communities, and they fought against thieves, robbers, and other outer attackers (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018).

The history of the Vigilantes looks back to decades. In the 1980s, poverty, insecurity, and crime struck the country due to budgeting issues, growing population, and climate change. In this situation, the civilians were frequently robbed on their way to markets, so the communities needed some security mechanism to protect them. The Hunters started patrolling the roads to deter the thieves. These Hunters became known later as Yan Banga (Vigilantes), and some of them joined the Vigilante Group Nigeria, which is a national organization to unify similar groups in the country (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018).

The militias mentioned above also take part in the fight against Boko Haram, but the presentation of their activity is out of the scope of this study.

Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was born

"...new national heroes!!!"

President Goodluck Jonathan

By the mid of Summer 2013, life in Maiduguri was unbearable for the citizens. Boko Haram spread fear among the population due to the bombings, suicide bombings, and violence against the residents. The shops and markets were closed, curfew was introduced, so everyday life was paralyzed. It was a very bad situation because the area's economy is primarily based on services and commodities trade, with an insignificant share of manufacturing. If the residents reported the insurgents to the security forces, the terrorists took revenge on them, if they were silent, the security forces arrested them as accomplices. In parallel with this, in pursuit of the terrorists, many innocent people were arrested and tortured by the security forces because they had no background knowledge and didn't know the languages, customs, and communities. As a result of this terrible situation, some young men grabbed sticks and started to pursue the hidden terrorists in their neighborhood. They arrested them and handed them over to the security forces. Their spontaneous actions spread across the town and its neighborhood. Many communities grabbed sticks and machetes and started to defend themselves. With the support of the older community members, the youngsters formed the "Yan Gora" which means "Youngsters with sticks" in English. Muslims and Christians protected each other's places of worship, patrolled the town and the communities and identified the Boko Haram members, and burnt their houses and in cases they committed extrajudicial killings (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018). Their actions were so successful that they largely stopped Boko Haram killings and bombings, and life in the city started to return to normal step by step. The vigilantes organized themselves into sectors and worked under the supervision of JTF sector commands. They were given security badges and ID cards. Thanks to these groups, the security situation in the city and its neighborhood has significantly improved. President Jonathan Goodluck called them "new national heroes" on 17 July 2013 (International Crisis Group, 2014). While many communities took part in forming Yan Gora, some others refused cooperation with the security forces because they feared retaliation by the insurgents.

What makes the CJTF different from other militias is that it is not organized on an ethnic or religious basis, or it is not against the government or other militias. It is established for ousting Boko Haram from Borno State. The CJTF as a bi-religious militia doesn't make a difference between its members on a religious basis. The recruits are required to swear an oath using the Bible or Qur'an depending on their faith (International Crisis Group, 2014). There are many reasons why Yan Gora was created even though communities already have militia groups (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2020):



- The Kungiyar Marhaba Yan Banga groups couldn't always respond to the security threats posed by insurgents because they had no adequate equipment.
- The existing groups considered that the fight against insurgents is inconsistent with their mission and feared their communities would be victims of retaliation.
- The number of group members wasn't enough to fight against the insurgents, and they didn't want to lower the entry requirements to add members.
- The members of the Kungiyar Marhaba and Yan Banga groups are mostly tribal religious, so the people rather joined the Yan Gora to avoid being involved in tribal religious practices.
- The existing groups had their own customs, ways of working, and leaders, so they were reluctant to work with the military. This circumstance spurred the establishment of a new militia group.

Members of the CJTF

The militia is a child of necessity, a citizen-driven communal response to the security challenge. Thousands of residents were caught between hammer and anvil, from one side the Boko Haram, and from the other side the security forces. They had to choose a side. The first members didn't join due to unemployment; rather, they wanted to protect their communities against Boko Haram attacks and recover their lives. Most members volunteered or were later sent by the communities to the militia, but in some unfortunate cases, they were forced by the militia or the communities to join.

Since its establishment, the CJTF has evolved into a complex and hierarchical organization, each local government area has its own commander. Today the organization has about 26,000 registered members of which 23% are women. Sixty-two per cent of the members have been recorded as youths below the age of 35 in Borno State and the neighbouring Yobe State, which are the areas most affected by the insurgency (Today.NG, 2021). The Borno State government set up the Borno Youths Empowerment Scheme BOYES to curb the discontent of the CJTF members, who sacrifice their job opportunities to join the militia. Only the members of this organization (about 1,800 persons) get an allowance from the BOYES, which is 50\$ (15,000 nairas) per month. The members got limited military training, uniform, patrol cars, identification documents. In addition to the Borno state government, the Every Nigerian Do Something (ENDS), North East Regional Initiative (NERI), some private politicians, residents of Borno State, and entrepreneurs also support the CJTF. According to the BOYES plans, the program would have trained up to 6,000 members, but the program stopped at about 1,850 members because the military found too many potentially unreliable persons among the trainees (Idayat and Pieri, 2018). Nearly 750 members got "special forces" training and fight along with the military units. The CJTF also has an intelligence unit of 100 officers spread across the states in plainclothes (Idayat and Pieri, 2018). Many problems stem from the under-budgeted organization, and the unpaid personnel discussed later in this study in a dedicated chapter.

Women in CJTF

"To protect my fellow females and the greatest misfortune is that my husband, my children, and other relations were killed. So I said to myself since one dies once, I decided to join and protect my country." A woman among the Civilian JTF" (Ozden and Kwabe, 2021)

There are two main components of recruiting female members to the CJTF. The first is the traditional reason because female warriors or hunters are not uncommon in the tribal culture in this part of the country. The other is that Boko Haram changed its tactic and started employing women and men pretending to be women to execute suicide bomb attacks.

The reasons why women join the Civilian JTF vary. One part of the women lost her relatives or loved ones in the fight against the Boko Haram, they have nothing to lose, so they want to take revenge on the insurgents, while others feel responsibility for the security of their community (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018).

Women's service in the organization is essential for the effective fight against insurgents (Idayat and Pieri, 2018, p.78). Because of certain religious and traditional cultural restrictions, there are tasks that can only be carried out by women. Only women can carry out perquisition in the absence of the husband, or they can pat down women at the checkpoints, to name a few. They are very good at intelligence as well. Another very important area where the women are irreplaceable is helping female victims and the investigation of sexual abuses because, for religious reasons, victims can only talk about their abuses to women. An excellent example of the female volunteers' competency is that today there are female sub-unit commanders in the CJTF.

Although nearly one-third of the CJTF members are female, their situation is not problem-free because of the organization's religious and traditional masculine attitude. The male members (especially the Muslim males) mock them for being in the organization instead of not being at home next to the stove and taking care of their husbands or children.

Children in the CJTF

From the first days of the organization, children took part in counter-insurgency activities. They were ideal messengers or intelligence collectors, crowd controllers, and they helped support activities such as food procurement, equipment maintenance, etc. It is no surprise that children wanted to join the organization because they got protection, food, and security. The positive example and the respect from the community towards Yan Gora also played an important role in their decision to join. In addition to these reasons, young girls joined the organization to express their solidarity with the abducted or sexually abused young girls and women. Unfortunately, children often witnessed physical violence or executions, and sometimes they participated in such activities. That was the reason why the UN raised its voice

against children's employment in the militia. The Civilian JTF complied with the request and, in 2017, dismissed child members from its ranks. Although it wasn't an easy process because children were reluctant to give up their livelihood or the respect they got from the community (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018).

Disabled members in the CJTF

The disabled people represent an uncommon category in a vigilante militia. In contrast with any malevolent prejudice, they are valuable members. Many of them were injured and paralyzed in the fights against insurgents but didn't leave the Yan Gora, they stayed instead, and take part in different not combatant activities. They play essential roles in checking the traffic in and out of IDP camps or taking part in community dispute resolutions. All in all, they are respected members of the communities (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2018).

The organizational structure of the Civilian JTF

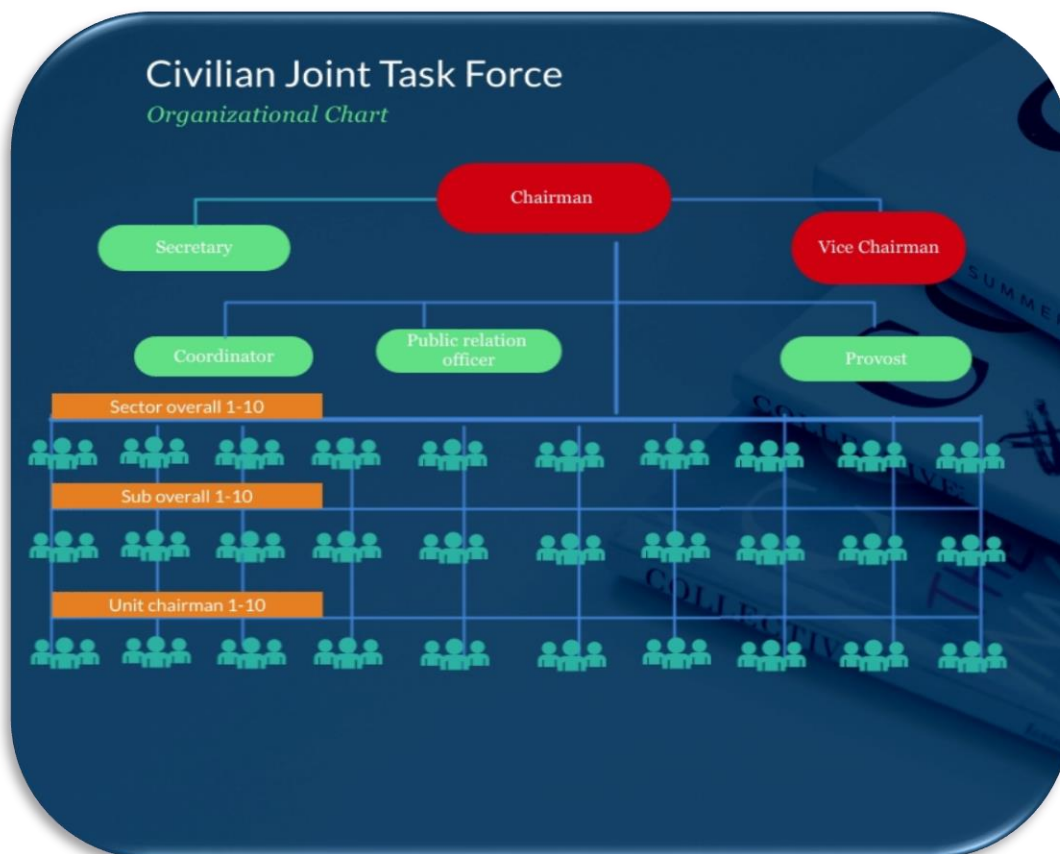


Figure 1. The organizational chart of the Civilian Joint Task Force (Source: Author)

Collecting information on the organizational structure of the CJTF is cumbersome because there is no officially published chart available in open sources. The author assumes two reasons: First is the security, while the second is the strict internet censorship in the country

(Akinpelu, 2021) and (2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders, 2021). The only available open-source resource is a study: "Community Perception of the Role of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Resisting Boko Haram Culture of Violence in Borno State, Nigeria" by Umar Lawal Yusuf. As it can be seen in Figure 1, the organization is hierarchical, similar to a general military, hierarchical order. The organization is divided into sectors and under each sector are subsectors and under each subsector are chairmen who supervise their variable number of subordinates. The headquarters or the leadership is in Maiduguri. Interestingly, rather than the central division of tasks, the work is organized locally together with the local security services. Though the sectors communicate with each other, they share their experiences. Typically, the higher-ranked leaders have prestige in the community and have civilian jobs such as entrepreneur or lawyer. Their reputation, work experiences, and organizational skills guarantee their successful leadership.

The two-folded roles of the CJTF

The activities of the Civilian JTF can be divided into non-combatant and combatant tasks.

The Non-Combatant role of the Civilian JTF in Borno State

As discussed above, the life circumstances were unbearable for the civilian people in Maiduguri and its neighborhood. They were caught between hammer and anvil because the insurgents and the security forces killed and tortured them alternately. Shops, markets, and government offices were closed, curfew was introduced, so everyday life was paralyzed. Under these circumstances, a handful of young residents decided to take their fate into their own hands. They knew the Boko Haram members and sympathizers, and they knew where they lived, so the youngsters grabbed sticks, went house by house, captured the insurgents, and handed them over to the security forces. Their **braveness was an example for other youngsters**, so the local initiative evolved into a movement. The security forces realized their valuable help in the fight against insurgents and formed a close connection with the militia named Civilian Joint Task Force. Since then, the security forces have been exploiting their special knowledge in relation to the language, culture, and terrain. They also participate in other security-related activities like maintaining checkpoints at the entrances of settlements or the IDP camps. The members of the CJTF pat down the suspicious persons. They are responsible for the security together with the military in IDP camps, and they also contribute to food distribution. The militia secures safe traffic on the high roads and carries out escort missions for the farmers as they take their goods to markets. CJTF members have also contributed to transporting women in labor to health facilities helping children in education and sports.

The militia plays an important role in improving civil-military relations as well. The CJTF has an intelligence unit whose officers are deployed to different places in plain clothes to carry



out covert intelligence-gathering about insurgents to share with the army (Idayat and Pieri, 2018, p.6.). The Civilian JTF also emerges where criminal or social deviance threatens public security and the government cannot protect its citizens (Bamidele, 2016).

The Combat Support Role of Civilian JTF in Borno State

In the beginning, CJTF wasn't a combatant group, but with time, it turned into an armed militia. This metamorphose was also the child of necessity. The government's military JTF comprises the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force, the Nigerian Navy, the Police, and the State Security Service (SSS). The personnel are from all over Nigeria. They don't know the local languages of the northeast region or understand the local culture, religion, or geography. They didn't know the leaders of the local communities either (Bamidele, 2016). The support of the CJTF is priceless for them. A good illustration of the importance of local knowledge e.g. is that linguistics classify twenty-six of the Chadic languages spoken in Borno state (About Borno – Borno State Government, 2021).

A small part of the volunteers was given military training and weapons then taken to combatant missions where their knowledge helped to find the insurgents even when they were in their hideouts or pretended to be local residents. The militia takes part in the defense of police stations, military barracks, or military arsenals. Under the command of the security forces, the CJTF units successfully fight against the insurgents (The Economist, 2016).

Effectiveness of the CJTF

Civilians credit the CJTF for bringing some stability and safety to Borno state. Nevertheless, it is a cumbersome task to measure the effectiveness of the CJTF as an organization. The reasons are the following:

- the organizational units are loosely connected, they have a relatively significant autonomy;
- for propaganda reasons, neither party publishes real numbers connected to the injured or victims; rather they magnify their victory;
- in the rural areas, there is no satisfactory control, and no chance to authenticate the reports;
- because of the reasons mentioned above, the international, independent databases can't record accurate data, although they seek to do so.

The researcher can't rely on the press or social media reports or posts because strict Internet censorship has been introduced in the country. According to Reporters Without Borders, the press is partly under governmental influence. Nigeria ranks 120th out of 180 countries on the press freedom list (2020 World Press Freedom Index | Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

Despite the difficulties, there is a chance to form an overall picture of the effectiveness of the CJTF.

The ACLED database records 5,514 Boko Haram-related incidents between November 6, 2009 and June 5, 2021 including those committed by the Islamic State West Africa Province

(ISWAP). Namely, ACLED considered the groups as one organization after they had announced their merger in 2015. The insurgent group is responsible for the death of more than 40,000 people, including losses in the security forces (unfortunately, the exact numbers by category are not available because ACLED in some cases doesn't make a distinction) and the displacement of more than 2.3 million people in Nigeria alone. Jubril Gunda, the spokesman of the CJTF, told in an interview with the Chinese Xinhua News Agency that the total loss from the beginning is more than 1,000 volunteers. Unfortunately, the numbers don't show the injured or paralyzed volunteers (Today.NG, 2021). The effectiveness of the CJTF is proved by the fact that since the beginning, they handed over more than 5,000 insurgents to the security forces without any help. Considering that the total number of the insurgents according to US intelligence estimation is somewhere between 4,000-6,000 people, this is a remarkable result (The Economist, 2016). Their achievement is more valuable in the light of their poor equipment. In an interview with the Irish Times, the members complained about their poor equipment, the lack of binoculars, guns, and garments (Hayden, 2017).

All in all, it is widely accepted in Nigeria that the CJTF played a significant role in improving the security in Borno state. People could get back on track with their everyday life. The volunteers' sacrifice sets an example for the rest of the population.

The dark side of the CJTF

Umar Lawal Yusuf in his study made interviews with residents of Borno state. According to his survey, the judgment of the CJTF is rather positive than negative. The subjects agreed that there are some harmful members of the organization but the good ones outweigh them.

Unfortunately, the organization's members were often blamed for engaging in sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2019, as presented in the Nigerian Premium Times, 1,300 displaced women from IDP camps in Maiduguri turned to the country's president because allegedly, the military soldiers and the members of the CJTF sexually abused them in exchange for food. They complained that their husbands have been in captivity for more than five years and blamed for being Boko Haram members without any trial (Haruna, 2018).

"We were starved and forced to give our bodies in exchange for food. We saw our children die and there was nothing we could do. Hundreds of people lost their lives in Bama Hospital camp – we in our group alone know 799 people who died. We were the silent witnesses of immense suffering." (Haruna, 2018)

According to Onyema Nwachukwu, the military spokesman at the Theater Command headquarters of Operation Lafiya Dole, the allegations are unfounded and intentionally try to undermine the connection between the soldiers and the residents and the morale of the soldiers.

The connection between the Nigerian government and Amnesty International deteriorated as the agency in 2018 published a report on the sexual abuses and exploitation committed by the members of the CJTF in the IDP camps and the rural areas. The government officially denied the charges and called for the agency to restrain itself from the unfounded allegations.

One of the often cited problem is the sexual abuse related crimes in connection with the CJTF, but the torture and extrajudicial killings also pop up from time to time. The hunting for the insurgents together with the security forces in some cases ends up in forced interrogation, torture, or extrajudicial killings.

In Figure 2, the riot is induced by the killing of a rickshaw driver who didn't stop at the CJTF checkpoint and got shot by the CJTF. The residents called for the ban of the CJTF. According to some residents, that was the last drop.



Figure 2. Protesters burn tires as they block the main road in Maiduguri on 30 June 2019, during a demonstration calling for a ban on the anti-Boko Haram CJTF militia they accuse of abuses after the killing of a rickshaw driver. (Source: AFP)

Unfortunately, the organization's name popped up in connection with the commission of extortion and theft, or looting, drug trading, and consumption, including the diversion of humanitarian aid. As the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Tukor Burati admitted in a Press Conference in 2017, the Nigerian military has detected some members of the CJTF as drug users and has recommended that their service be terminated. He also admitted that using drugs may spur the abusers to commit war crimes (Ozden and Kwabe, 2021).

The victims don't report these atrocities to the police or the military because they think they have a close connection with the CJTF and the report is hopeless (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2019).

"The government gives nothing to their family," said CJTF Sector 10 member Bashir Mohammed (22). "No compensation to their wife or children, no schooling. They'll just give your body back" (Hayden, 2017).

In connection with stealing, extortion, and looting or the diversion of food supplies, the perpetrators said in their defense that they have no salary or supply. They and their families are starving while they work for the community. The international organizations supply the residents in the camps, but they get nothing although they are responsible for the security of the camps. They work for free and put their life at risk every day (Hayden, 2017).

The United Nations noted the problem connected with the abuses committed by the vigilantes and started a new training program for the CJTF and the vigilante groups in the Northern region in Nigeria in 2019. The program aimed to teach human rights and leadership to the group members. A further aim was to teach better crisis situation management and how to find suspected criminals in cooperation with legitimate state agents without abusing human rights (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2019).

Conclusion – The future vision of CJTF

With the death of Abubakar Shekau the so far unattainable aim is at the horizon. Boko Haram is undoubtedly weakened, even if we know that its fighters took an oath of allegiance to the ISWAP on 20 June 2021, and announced that their new leader is Abba Ibrahim Al Khuraishi (RFI, 2021). This renewed treaty brought changes. First, the attacks against innocent civilians were lowered in number (these attacks were the main reason why the earlier treaty failed). Second, there are daily reports on capitulated Boko Haram insurgents in the Nigerian press. Only in August 2021, hundreds of insurgents surrendered with their family members to the security forces.

It seems that this phenomenon surprised even the legal system. This is a new situation and is a source of many problems. The forgiveness for the insurgents makes the people and the vigilantes angry. These terrorists killed their relatives, family members, and comrades while the government plans a rehabilitation program to drive them back to everyday life. At the same time, the CJTF members put their life at risk and get nothing in exchange. It sowed the seeds of dissatisfaction among CJTF members as well.

Of course, the end of the war against insurgents is far away from its end, and the ISWAP is still strong. In its announcements and video messages, they try to convince the people of their strength.



Nevertheless, this new situation is interpretable as a rehearsal for the peace, the end of the war with the insurgents.

Chika Oduah in "Nigeria Vigilantes Ponder Future After Fighting Boko Haram", and Umar Lawal Yusuf in "Community Perception of the Role of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Resisting Boko Haram Culture of Violence in Borno State, Nigeria," interviewed residents and CJTF members about the future of the organization after the war against the insurgents.

The CJTF members are mostly worried about unemployment, and they fear integration because they lived a different lifestyle. Many dropped out of school or left it intentionally to serve the community. Today they have no profession, and they are undereducated. Some of them would like to join the military or the police, but they are not eligible to be soldiers because of their low level of education and health conditions.

They need governmental rehabilitation programs to get new chances to integrate into everyday life, but they haven't gotten any plan or promise yet.

As for the civilian people, they are mostly worried about the close connection of the CJTF with the politicians. Namely, in the last few years, the politicians started to exploit the organization for their own interests. Their second worry is the connection between the CJTF and the other vigilantes' organizations. There is more support for the CJTF than others. This imbalance may lead to armed conflicts among the organizations. The third worry comes from the unemployed but armed and trained in the art of warfare members in case of governmental neglect. The civilians think that after the war the CJTF volunteers without any vision of the future may migrate into or create criminal gangs (Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), 2019).

Today these worries are not yet actual: it seems that the fight against the insurgents is a long-lasting process, and no one can tell when it reaches its end. Until then, there is a chance to elaborate a multi-faceted program and system for the rehabilitation of CJTF members.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

Attila Gulyás ret. Lt. Colonel graduated from the Kossuth Lajos Military college as an infantry officer in 1988. After serving four years as a troop officer, he was transferred to the Military Security Office, where he served in different positions. He retired from the service as a head of a department and in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2010. He has been interested in IT for a quarter-century. His hobby is computer programming (VB.net, Visual C++, and Python) and computer forensics on personal computers on MS Windows and Linux operating systems. He is a doctoral student at the Óbuda University Doctoral School on Safety and Security Sciences, researching the connection between terrorism and the Dark Web. His research subject is terrorist activity in cyberspace: from social media to the Dark Web.

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