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Full Length Paper

The Kirten Militia and Security among the Kuteb in Southern Taraba, 1993-2018

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Abstract

Every society worldwide faces various security challenges. Nigeria and Taraba State in particular are not exceptions. Bad leadership and injustice have bred several forms of insecurity in the country, such as banditry, kidnapping, terrorism/insecurity and ethnic violence, amongst others. These forms of insecurity have given birth to ethnic armies, otherwise known as ethnic militias, as a safety net to cover up for government inadequacies. It is in this light that the Kirten militia emerged among the Kuteb in Southern Taraba State amidst growing insecurity in the region. Thus, this study investigated the Kirten militia against the objectives of identifying the basis of the various ethnic rivalries, examining the existing boundaries between Kirten and official security operatives, and assessing the impact of Kirten activities among the Kuteb. The historical methodology was employed for the study, which mirrored the analysis from time perspectives. The findings show that inadequacies of government have resulted in struggles over resources, political leadership, chieftaincy titles, and land among other things by ethnic groups in Takun, mainly Kuteb, Chamba, Jukun, and Fulani. The Kirten, which emerged among the Kuteb to protect its interest, has often clashed with official security operatives due to a lack of a clear-cut operational boundary. Hence, the study recommends reviewing the recruitment process for leadership to ensure good leadership and justice delivery. Given the vulnerable security situation, ethnic militia need to be recognised, reorganised and operational boundaries established. The study has indeed extended scholarship on security systems in Nigeria, particularly ethnic militias as part of the security architecture.

Keywords: Taraba, Takum, Ethnic Militia, Security, Ethnic clashes,

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INTRODUCTION

Different dimensions of security challenges confront most societies worldwide. One such challenge is ethnic rivalry revolving around political, social or economic issues which has oftentimes resulted in conflict with devastating effects. The prevalence of this kind of insecurity has compelled many groups to form a defence system for themselves in the form of ethnic militias. But the activities of militia groups in most societies have raised so many contentious issues relating to their categorisation. Some scholars have made several attempts to categorise militia groups. One type is the state-supported militia, owned by the state or community and not part of the regular army. As non-professionals, they were only mobilised in times of emergency to protect

the government or the community while carrying out military duties. Some states, like the United States in the early parts of its evolution, gave constitutional backing for the establishment of militia groups. (Harbo) There is also the non-state militia, which is more of a civil society and emerges on the basis of interest and ideology. These outfits set out to defend the interests of their sponsors or groups when such interests are threatened and legal means have failed. The Chameleon (Fluid) militia also exists. The emergence of this is attributed to the gap created by state-supported militia. This category is poorly structured and lacks a formal identity. Their existence is tied to economic or social conditions. Meeting their social or economic needs can easily control their violent activities. (Harbo)

It is in this light that the Kuteb people, mostly found in the southern part of Taraba State, Nigeria, have throughout history developed ways of defending their communities. One of the most visible and potent defence mechanisms for them is the Kirten ethnic militia. Since the creation of Taraba State in 1991, this outfit has created security challenges that the state continues to grapple with. The outfit has been involved in prosecuting ethnic conflicts, claiming the status of a parallel security force, which has resulted in tensions between the militia and state security operatives, such as the police. Furthermore, the need for arms within this area due to security challenges has heightened its proliferation, thereby resulting in armed robbery, kidnapping and associated crises. These circumstances exposed a gap in the operating boundaries between the militia and official security operatives, hence rendering the region vulnerable to all forms of ethnic violence.

The study thus focuses on the following objectives:

1. To identify and discuss the nature of ethnic rivalries/violence in southern Taraba
2. To examine the existing boundaries between Kirten and official security operatives
3. And to discuss the impact of the Kirten activities among the Kuteb in Southern Taraba

Indeed, this study constitutes not only a significant contribution to the question of peace and security that has eluded communities in southern Taraba but also has broadened the body of knowledge on security studies in Nigeria, particularly ethnic militia groups. Thus, the study is organised around themes such as instances of ethnic rivalries and conflicts, interventions and boundaries between Kirten and official security establishment, and impacts of the Kirten activities among the Kuteb in southern Taraba.

METHODOLOGY

The study is on the Kirten Militia among the Kuteb in the Takum and Ussa Local Government Areas of Taraba State, Nigeria. The historical methodology was employed for the study so as to trace the incidences of ethnic rivalries in Takum. In that regard, primary and secondary sources were called upon. The primary sources utilised included oral interviews where firsthand information was obtained directly from the people who passed through incidences of ethnic violence, and also some members of the Kirten were interviewed to understand the nature of their activities. Two relevant archival materials obtained from the National Archive Kaduna (NAK) were used, which provided some perspectives on the chieftaincy issue during the colonial era; official documents sourced from the government of Taraba State; the National Boundary Commission Taraba State; and committee reports from community leaders, which enriched the study on contending issues involving power tussles, chieftaincy titles, and land matters, amongst others. Newspapers report, obtained via Google search, provided instances of the various ethnic clashes in the region.

The secondary sources used were mainly books and journal articles from personal and individual libraries, while some were from Google searches. Main keywords used for the search included 'Taraba State', 'ethnic clashes', 'ethnic militia', 'chieftaincy tussle in Takum', and 'power struggle', among others. These sources, when put together, were compared, and potential biases were minimised. The study was presented in themes, which were analysed and synthesised based on both empirical and field evidence. The findings determined the conclusion of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kirten and Ethnic Conflict or Clashes

The Jukun/Chamba and Kuteb conflict, which was prosecuted by the Kirten Militia from 1993, was generated by the interplay of both remote and immediate factors. The remote causes of conflict between Kuteb Jukun Chamba have been chieftaincy tussles and mutual feelings of political domination. The chieftaincy tussle has its roots in the colonial period, when the British colonial government recognised the Ukwe traditional institution as the supreme traditional institution in the area (Dewar 29). From independence, the native authority law of 1963 also recognised the traditional stool, but since 1975, there has been an effort through a Gazette by the Chamba to alter the traditional institution in Kuteb land. This lingering issue has always been the source of conflict in the area. (Government of Benue Plateau) It is important to note that in all the conflicts or crises involving the Kirten militia in Kuteb land, which will be discussed below, the militia acted as a fighting force. This aligns with its self-assumed role as the defender of the Kuteb nation and its interests.

Kirten and Kuteb-Chamba Crisis of 1993

Before the creation of Taraba State in 1991, the

political scene was already charged between the Jukun/Chamba and the Kuteb due to the existing chieftaincy tussle and political calculations leading up to independence and beyond. There was mutual suspicion among these groups living in Kuteb land. So the gubernatorial election that followed the creation of Taraba State ushered in renewed rivalry between the ethnic groups. There was competition for the attainment of primordial interests, state resources and political power. What this means is that the creation of the State had opened an opportunity for interested parties to occupy state power. The Kuteb politicians had feared that the Chamba politicians or power brokers would sabotage the efforts of Kuteb, who had a gubernatorial candidate in person, Dr Andokari A. Shiaki of the National Republic Convention (NRC). He was to face the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate, Rev. Jolly Nyame. (Mgbe)

The fears among the Kuteb were confirmed when Dr Andokari A. Shiaki of the National Republican Convention was disqualified by the Electoral Commission on the Eve of the elections. One of the reasons given for this disqualification was that it was on security grounds. Though Shiaki was not disqualified by the Chamba ethnic group, there was suspicion among the Kuteb towards the Chamba, who had men of influence like Theophilus Danjuma. In March 1993, the annual Kuteb cultural festival, Kuchicheb, faced an interruption while the dust from the disqualification of the Kuteb candidate had not yet settled. The incident led to a crisis between the Kuteb and Chamba in 1993. The Kirten militia was at the centre of the crisis; it has arrogated to itself the role of a fighting force to defend the Kuteb cause. The Chamba youths, under the leadership of Polycarp Istifanus, interrupted a procession of Kuteb people during the annual Kuchicheb harvest thanksgiving festival and shot down six (6) people, leaving several others severely injured before the intervention of security. The ring leader of the gunmen, Polycarp Istifanus, who was arrested for instigating violence, was set free without trials. The reprisals from Kirten, which led to a full-blown clash, put the number of those who lost their lives close to fifty (50) and several others injured. (Ahmadu 198)

Kirten and Kuteb-Chamba/Jukun Crisis of 1997

Apart from the other remote causes of the Kuteb-chamba/Jukun crisis, which included chieftaincy tussle and the political manipulation or mutual fear of political domination, boundary dispute is another underlying factor in the 1997 crisis. In 1981, the civilian government of Abubakar Barde created more local government areas in Gongola State, raising the number from seventeen to forty. Among them were Donga and Ussa, which were carved out from Takum. General Muhammadu Buhari scrapped the new local governments, including Donga and Ussa, along with others throughout the country in 1983. But before their dissolution, Ussa and Takum had defined boundaries which were codified in Gongola State Gazette No. 34 Vol. 6 of August 27, 1981, GGS Law No. 5 of 1981 – Local Government Edict 1977 (Amendment 53-A 85) Law 1981. With this, Takum Local Government was made up of four (4) districts, namely, Takum, Chanchanji, Kogi and Kashimbilla, while Ussa Local Government had Lissam, Kpambo and Ayikuben. (Ahmadu 218)

When there was a need for the creation of more states and local governments by the General Sani Abacha regime, stakeholders in all the communities in Takum Local Government met with the Traditional Council and proposed the creation of the Ussa Local Government Council. The proposal was forwarded to the State Government for ratification and onwards transmission to the Arthur Mbanefo panel. (Memorandum by Takum Community) While this was going on, a section of the Chamba/Jukun community submitted a separate memorandum on January 10, 1997, for the same purpose. The memorandum was aimed at entrenched political dominance of Chamba, and it violated all the set criteria for local government creation, which include population, land contiguity and cultural affinity. Being unfamiliar with the pattern of settlements and the village location that makes up Takum, the memorandum listed the names of all Kuteb settlements in and around Takum irrespective of their proximity to the town and lumped them together as belonging to Ussa, while isolated Chamba and Jukun villages sandwiched among Kuteb settlements, in spite of their remoteness from Takum, were listed as under Takum. (Danjuma et al.)

On the issue of population, the memorandum arbitrarily allocated figures to Takum and Ussa, respectively. In addition to the memorandum was a suspended map of Ussa and Takum, which defied understanding. None of the signatories to the proposal for the creation of Ussa were indigenous of the Ussa Local Government Area. Some of the signatories to the memorandum were Mr D. P. Ashu, Mr. Ibrahim Pantuvo, Mr. Danazumi Sampati, Bawa Tati and Gen. T.Y. Danjuma. All of them were either Chamba or Jukun, who had nothing at stake in Ussa but were strongly clamouring for the creation of Ussa Local Government for the Kuteb people without their input. (Danjuma et al.) But when the Arthur Mbanefo Panel went out for verification of the submissions, they could not recommend the T.Y. Danjuma proposal for lack of merit. The Mbanefo committee accepted and recommended the collective request on the basis of which Ussa Local Government was created since it was simply a re-establishment of what was obtained in 1981. And it was set back for such memorandums following the March 15, 1997, local government elections, as their candidates lost out. With the election results, the factional chamba Jukun community pressed on. And people were surprised to see a new boundary of Ussa and Takum based on the T. Y

Danjuma proposal. It was contained in a circular GHQ/228/ of 28 April 1997 and endorsed by General Lawrence Onoja. (Ahmadu 220) Coupled with the new boundary adjustment was the directive to dissolve the two local government councils to appoint sole administrators to them and to set in motion a process for fresh elections based on new boundaries. This was in addition to the interruption of the Kuchicheb festival.

This led to a crisis, and again Kirten was involved in the prosecution of the crisis. The crisis had a devastating effect on the people who lived in Takum as the crisis lasted for three years. Over two hundred (200) people were killed, and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed. (Innocent 156–68) Several committees were set up to find a lasting solution to the Kuteb-Chamba/Jukun crisis of 1997.

Kirten and the Kuteb-Tiv Crisis, 2006

The Kuteb-Tiv crisis can be traced back to the pre-colonial period. Their migration into the area was due to their search for arable land to cultivate. It should be noted that the Tiv people are known for their agrarian nature, and their movement from one place to the other has been attributed to the desire to acquire new land for agricultural activities. Their search for land has brought them into conflict with most settlements at various times. When the British colonial administrators arrived in Kuteb land, they had identified a land ownership or boundary dispute in the area. In fact, by 1917, there was a policy of mass ejection of Tiv people who encroached into the area from the Tiv Division. But soon, they began to encroach into Kuteb land, and the British colonial government had to settle a boundary disagreement in 1922. The British government had to jettison the ring fence policy and accommodated the Tiv people on land which was previously not in the Tiv Division, owing to their desire to collect taxes. And this created a crisis of farmland in Kuteb land. The Kuteb people in the area had accused the Tiv of taking up virgin lands in the area with the intention of returning to their virgin land in the Tiv Division when the land in Kuteb land was no longer productive. (Dewar 117–18)

Soon after independence, the structure of Nigeria and the nature of politics, which was ethnic-based, saw three ethnic-based political parties formed, namely the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the north, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC) in the east, and the Action Group in the west. The political structure at that time led to agitations by the minority groups who felt they had been marginalised. One such agitation was led by J.S. Tarka, the leader of the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). The primary aim of Chief Tarka was to fight for the independence of the Tivs from the hands of the Northern People's Congress. The fight led to the emancipation of the struggle of the people we now refer to as the Middle Belt. The struggle degenerated into a major crisis, which is now referred to as the Tiv riots between 1960 and 1964. The Nigerian Army was drafted or called upon to quell those riots. Indeed, the riots were felt in Kuteb land, as some of its settlements became vulnerable to the political crisis. For instance, Gawa village was burnt down, and also Chanchanji. (Innocent 118–19)

Recently, the crisis that has erupted and lingered since 2006 is attributed to land tussles. There has always been disagreement over the ownership of land between Kuteb and Tiv. These crises over land have often occurred in the Yangtu Special Development Area. The dispute has always been over land at Kaaor settlement near the Army Barracks in Takum. And this area has become a flash point in recent times for crisis between the Kuteb and Tiv people. In 2013 there was a recurrence of the Tiv/Kuteb crisis. In this crisis sixteen people were reportedly killed. The affected areas in the crisis include Tompo, Age, Campo-Ugbenger, along Kashimbilla Road, and Tse-Azer. Arms proliferation and production have heightened the hostilities in the area due to the fertile soil for cultivation. The immediate cause of the 2013 crisis was said to be the missing of four Tiv farmers. What began as a skirmish degenerated into a fierce and full-scale offensive. (Ihyongu)

The deadliest of the Tiv/Kuteb crises was the May 2015 crisis, where about 84 persons were killed and many houses destroyed. The crisis occurred in Takum, where over twenty (20) Tiv residents, mostly students, were killed in Takum, and five students were killed at the school of the Health Technology hostel. Thirty (30) persons were killed at a Tiv settlement, Yongogba, along the Takum-Kpashe road. Butu village also came under attack. The crisis was said to have been triggered as vengeance on five Kuteb who were killed at Age by Tiv militia (Ihyongu) on Barracks–Dogon Gawa road. The highway linking Takum to Katsina-Ala became deadly as both sides to the conflict laid siege, killing passengers.

Kirten and Farmers/Herdsmen Clashes, 2016

Generally speaking, there are a number of factors responsible for the farmers/herdsmen crisis in Nigeria. One of such factors can be attributed to changing climatic conditions. The Sahara desert has encroached into the original place of abode of herdsmen in the Sahel region. This has caused a continued southward migration of herdsmen seeking pastures green. This southward migration has led to intrusion or trespass into spaces which have been under cultivation for long by settled farmers. With climatic change and desert encroachment, there is added pressure on land for both farming and cattle breeding.

Another dimension to the natural resource conflict in Nigeria is the scarcity of fresh water, though it has been under-estimated. There is an increasing demand for fresh

water with each passing year due to the world's increasing population. This fresh water scarcity is creating security concerns in some parts of Nigeria and Africa as a whole. The availability of water, which is a major resource needed for both agriculture and grazing, is decreasing partly due to changes in global climatic conditions. Farmers and pastoralists who are the main agriculture practitioners in Nigeria depend on water resources to sustain their vocations. Access to water and grazing land has become more competitive and has led to violent conflicts on a regular basis between farmers and herdsmen.

The destruction of farms or intentional grazing on crops by herdsmen has also caused conflict between farmers and herdsmen. Deliberate grazing of cattle on crops, farmers' encroachment on grazing reserves, water holes and cattle paths, as well as indiscriminate bush burning by herders, have also played their part in farmers' herdsmen clashes. (Anthony 54–62) Also critical in the clashes between herdsmen and farmers is the phenomenon of indigenisation in Nigeria. This phenomenon confers on an individual the right to own land. The effect of this in Kuteb land is that there is a feeling that Fulani herdsmen are not indigenous to the society and cannot lay claim to land. Most African societies often view land as an ancestral or historical heritage that strangers or foreigners cannot take. Therefore, the issues of indigenisation and settler status have become very serious in discussions about clashes between farmers and herdsmen. (Tenuche and Ifatimihin 360–64)

The farmers' herders' clashes in Kuteb land can be traced to an incident on 30 April 2016 at Tati Kumbu village in the April 2016 at Tati Kumbu village in Takum Local Government Area. It was said to have begun when a Fulani man, while cutting the leaves of a tree to feed his animals in a Kuteb man's farm, was allegedly attacked and killed by the owner. A herder killed a Kuteb farmer in a stream in the same area as a form of reprisal. The incident led to the outbreak of a crisis. Kirten went on a rampage, attacking herdsmen settlements in both Ussa and Takum Local Governments. Kirten killed over nineteen (19) herdsmen, injured about seventy (70), and left approximately 320 others missing. Authorities ordered herdsmen to vacate Takum and Ussa. (Isa) Since the incident on 30th April 2016, there have been various forms of reprisal attacks from both the Kirten and Fulani militias. The farmers' and herders' clash in Kuteb land continued until 2018. The government of Taraba State and Nigeria is still grappling with the menace of farmer-herder clashes, where close to a hundred (100) people have been killed. Both farmers and herdsmen have made allegations about how each other's actions have strained relations and led to conflict or deadly clashes. (Rimamtari)

Kirten and clash with security agents.

One common feature or characteristic of ethnic militias is their disposition to clash with state security agencies. This tendency is attributed to their self-acclaimed or self-apportioned role of being a parallel security outfit within their various spheres of influence. Instances abound where various ethnic militia have clashed with security agents. One such case was reported in October 1999 when members of the Oodua Peoples' Congress OPC clashed with the Nigerian Police in Ilesa, Osun State. Within that period, another clash took place in the Ajegunle area of Lagos, where twenty-three (23) people lost their lives. In January 2000 a clash between the Oodua Peoples' Congress OPC and the Nigeria Police led to the death of the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) for the Bariga area in Lagos, Mr Afolabi Amoo (Otite 812).

The activities of the Kirten militia have also led to clashes with state security agents. One such instance was the clash between Kirten and the Nigerian Police, Ussa Local Government Division, in July 2005. The clash was in reaction to the arrest of a Mason who had a disagreement with his customer. The man who was reported to the police was tortured into a coma. While other friends followed up to resolve the matter, another fellow had an accident which led to his death. The incident led to a confrontation between the Nigeria Police and Kirten. The Police Division in Ussa Local Government was burnt down, and valuable documents were destroyed. Police officers were molested and manhandled, though none lost his or her life. The Taraba State Government intervened to bring the issue under control. In fact, there was a compulsory transfer of all the police officers and men who served at the Division prior to the clash in 2005. (Rikwentishe) A new batch of police officers was subsequently deployed to man the Police Division in Ussa Local Government.

There are also several cases of Kirten clash with the Vehicle Inspection Official (V.I.O.). The clash is often on the grounds of perceived exploitation of motorcycle owners, popularly known as 'Okada' riders, as well as private and commercial vehicle users. The impounding of motor cycles and vehicles by those inspection officials has led to a series of confrontations with Kirten. Check points mounted by such officials have been destroyed on several occasions. They have also faced physical assaults. This situation has become a regular occurrence due to the daily activities of commercial motorcyclists popularly known as Okada. (Rucwukob)

The Kirten militia clashed with the Nigerian military personnel deployed on Operation Cat Race. While conducting their exercise, the military encountered a Kirten member who allegedly possessed a firearm. The

military summoned him, but he fled and tried to escape. He was pursued by the military and shot, which led to his death. Other Kirten members mobilised and pursued the military personnel to the 93 Battalion Barracks in Takum, Taraba State. This was in protest at the killing of a Kirten member whose body was carried to the barracks. There was serious disagreement between Kirten and the military. The militia members were pacified by the conversation they had with the Executive Chairman of both Ussa and Takum Local Governments, who promised to follow up on the matter. Kirten members were aggrieved that they had to defend themselves and their land from the rampaging herdsmen who had been killing and maiming Kuteb people. The violence has also led to the displacing of Kuteb from their communities. (Soloman)

Kirten and arms proliferation in Kuteb Land

The activities of Kirten have heightened the proliferation of arms as well as their production in Kuteb land. This phenomenon of proliferation and production of arms represents a threat and challenge not only to Kuteb land but also to most societies of the world. In Nigeria, this has led to an increase in clashes among groups within societies, as well as a rise in organised criminal activities, insurgency, and terrorist activities, which in turn create threats to peaceful co-existence and development. The weak nature of states and their failure to deliver good governance contribute to this worrying trend in Africa. These small arms and light weapons are often used to displace civilians, block humanitarian activities or assistance, and prevent or delay projects. In non-conflict areas, criminals may use small arms and light weapons to commit homicides and suicides. Terrorists also depend on them to wreak havoc in societies. (Mallam 1–10)

Chad, the Republic of Niger, Mali, and other countries supply some of the weapons used in Kuteb land and Taraba State as a whole. This influx is in addition to the small arms and light weapons produced or fabricated locally. The weapons smuggled into Taraba include AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) (Mohammed), etc. These illegal weapons and their circulation have heightened the spate of armed robbery, kidnapping and other violent crimes in Kuteb land. The high rate of arms proliferation in Taraba is to blame for the ethno-religious crisis. Indeed, Taraba State and Kuteb land, in particular, have witnessed a number of such clashes. Instances can be seen from the 1993 Kuteb/Chamba crisis, the 1997 Kuteb-Jukun/Chamba crisis, the Kuteb/Tiv crisis which began in 2005, and the farmers/herdsmen clashes which were all prosecuted by the Kirten militia.

Gun runners who operate black markets for the sale of arms do exist in Kuteb land, Taraba State, Nigeria. The illegal trade involves dubious personnel from security agencies. The Department of State Security (DSS) revealed a finding where it states that armed forces and other security agencies have been involved in illegal arms deals with unknown Nigerians, which have worsened the security situation in the country. The report was in response to the House of Representatives Joint Committee on Customs, Excise and National Intelligence. The head of Operations of DSS, Godwin Eteng, disclosed that some security agencies have enlisted the services of people with questionable character, like cultists and armed robbers, as a result of inadequate screening or background checks. He mentioned an instance in which arms and ammunition went missing from the armoury of one of the armed forces, with the items disappearing mysteriously and without a trace. He also accused some states of being complicit in arms proliferation by acting as conduits of deadly weapons being used to execute ethnic wars in some parts of Nigeria. The states indicted include Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba and Plateau States. According to the findings, three-quarters of arms used to prosecute the conflicts in southern Kaduna, Zamfara and Plateau States were obtained from Nassarawa, Benue, Taraba and Plateau States. (“Dubious Recruitment”)

The presence of gun runners and a black market for arms has opened up other areas of threat to security in Kuteb land, Taraba State, Nigeria. One of such worrying trends is the phenomenon of kidnapping. Kidnapping for ransom now represents a lucrative business for criminals. Kidnapping has become a serious security concern that is fast spreading across Nigeria. It began in the creeks of the Niger Delta but has become a nightmare, owing to the fact that it has attracted many jobless youths in Nigeria. Initially, it was the kidnapping of expatriates that was predominant. But the situation has deteriorated so bad that nobody is safe. Serving government officials are not spared from the kidnapping menace, as their family members, relatives, and friends have all become targets. (Mac-Leva)

The abduction of Hosea Ibi is a case in point. He was abducted by armed men on the 30th of December 2017 in his hometown, Takum, and his body was found days later along Takum Kashimbilla Road. Until his death, he was representing the Takum I Constituency at the Taraba State House of Assembly. (Mkom) There was also the case of the kidnapping of a businessman popularly known as Chidi Bore in Mammy Market opposite the army barracks in Takum in January 2018. He was said to have been abducted by four gunmen at about 8pm at his shop. The kidnappers who came on motorcycles started shooting in the air to scare people away and escaped with their victim through the road leading to Katsina-Ala, Benue State. He was later released. (Hunkuyi) There was also the attempted kidnapping of an oil marketer in broad daylight in Takum, popularly known as “Mayo oil", which the Nigerian police foiled within the same period. Kidnapping for ransom has become almost a daily occurrence on the Takum-Katsina Ala and Takum-Wukari highways, where travellers are kidnapped and their family

members are required to pay ransom before they are released.

Armed robbers and other sorts of criminals are fast abandoning their trades for the more lucrative business of kidnapping. A survey of the top ten (10) countries with high kidnapping records in 2007 shows that Nigeria occupied the sixth (6th) position. But Nigeria has since 2007 moved up the third (3rd) position behind Mexico and Colombia (3rd) position behind Mexico and Colombia. Several cases of kidnapping in Kuteb land, Taraba and Nigeria as a whole, are not reported in the media. So many other cases are not reported to the security operatives because kidnappers threaten families of their victims over involving the police. The National Assembly recently, in a bid to check the menace of kidnapping, agreed to begin a process for the enactment of a law that would prescribe capital punishment for kidnappers across the country. The National Assembly has also asked State governments to enact laws that would prosecute kidnappers in their jurisdiction. (Mac-Leva)

Another worrying phenomenon in Kuteb land, which is also attributed to the circulation of illegal arms, is the challenge of armed robbery. The production and proliferation of small arms and light weapons have led to the formation of criminal gangs who engage in armed robbery. A case that readily comes to mind is the broad day robbery which led to the carting away of the May 2015 salary of Takum Local Government Staff. The driver conveying the cash was trailed from the Takum branch of Zenith International Bank and was shot in the middle of the town. (Bulus) This is in addition to the highway robbery on the Takum-Katsina-Ala road, Takum-Wukari road, Takum-Jalingo road and Takum-Ussa road. These robberies have become a daily occurrence.

Closely related to armed robbery, which is violent in nature, is the phenomenon of assassination. Some of the violent features of ethnic militias include such phenomena as riots, armed robbery, arson, guerrilla warfare, civil wars, coups d'état, assassinations, insurrections, rebellions and the like. The exposure to arms and ammunition has also enabled criminally minded elements to embark on assassinations of either business or political opponents. This represents another challenge to the desire of the government to maintain law and order, as well as ensure the security of lives and property. In September 2015, Mr Robbie, an expatriate who works with PW Construction Company, was assassinated along Takum-Wukari Road. He was said to have been trailed from the Takum branch of the United Bank for Africa (UBA), where he did a financial transaction. Security operatives promised to get the roots of the matter. But nothing concrete has been heard since then, though arrests were made in the course of the investigation. There is also the case of the assassination of a businessman who is an oil marketer. Popularly known as Eze Kuti, he was shot at his home after the close of business. (Danzumi)

Cattle rustling is another area of threat to peaceful co-existence in Kuteb land. Herdsmen have had to contend with the menace of their cattle being stolen. The activities of these criminals, who are often armed with all sorts of weapons, like AK-47s and rocket launchers, have led to a lot of casualties in terms of injury and sometimes death to the herdsmen. These criminal elements cut across different ethnic groups in Kuteb land.

Some of the general reasons being advocated as the cause of cattle rustling include the worsening material/livelihood conditions of herdsmen arising from the repercussion of climate change and the attendant resources among herders. Proliferation of arms and ammunition in Kuteb land and Africa at large has placed enormous weaponry in the hands of criminal elements, some of whom perpetrate cattle rustling. Terrorism and armed rebellion in Sub-Saharan Africa have promoted cattle rustling as a franchise dedicated to funding a group of strugglers. The remoteness of grazing fields makes effective surveillance and policing of cattle herds problematic. The porous nature of interstate border lines in Africa makes trans-border cattle rustling conducive and thriving. There is free movement across Kuteb land and Cameroon due to the porous nature of the border. (Okoli and Okpaleke)

There are so many cases of cattle rustling in Kuteb land that are not reported due to the remote areas where herdsmen graze their cattle. Most times the owners of those cattle are killed or even kidnapped. Sometimes kirtens have been called in to settle such cases where the cattle are located. The leaders of such herdsmen have also had to intervene in cases of rustling. But some of the clashes that have occurred in Kuteb land are attributed to the activities of cattle rustling and not necessarily the destruction of farmland or restriction on the source of water in host communities. (Isa)

Interventions on Arms Proliferation in Kuteb Land

There has been an effort made at various levels of the world government to stem the tide of arms proliferation. These efforts took a more serious dimension in the 1990s following the outbreak of civil wars in Somalia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda. These wars, including the ones in Kuteb land, were prosecuted with small arms and light weapons and so became the basis for the development of various initiatives both at the global and regional levels to curb the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. (Mallam 6) The recently launched Operation Cat Race, which was saddled with the responsibility to check the spate of killings and violent clashes between farmers and herdsmen as well as other criminal activities, can be considered a modest effort in a bid to check the worrying trend of arms proliferation. The Operation covered Kaduna, Nassarawa, Benue and Taraba State. Whether

it was part of their mandate to embark on a house-to-house search for arms or not, the army personnel involved in Operation Cat Race embarked on a house-to-house search and recovered some arms in Kuteb land. These were mostly locally made weapons. (Godwin)

There was also the establishment and commissioning of the Mobile Police Unit by the Inspector General of Police, Mr Ibrahim Idris, in Kuteb land in April 2018, which can also be seen as an effort to curb the rising effects of arms proliferation in Kuteb land. There is also a special operation ongoing in Kuteb land by a detachment of special forces to check or stem the tide of arms proliferation. Code named “Operation Whirl Stroke”, it comprises military personnel who are also equipped with motor cycles to enable them to get to remote parts of Kuteb land. The use of vehicles had restricted such operation to the main roads. Indeed, the use of motorcycles by this special force has given them access to the remote or interior parts of Kuteb Land. This is to consolidate on the gains of “Operation Cat Race", which preceded the ongoing operation.

Impact of Kirten Activities

The activities of the Kirten militia have affected socio-cultural activities in Kuteb land. Such activities, which culminate in violence and/or confrontation with other groups, have had negative effects on social interactions in Kuteb land. One such can be seen from the ban on socio-cultural activities by the Taraba State Government. Cultural festivities in Kuteb land have been an avenue for interactions where people from the works of life were attracted. The Kuchicheb cultural festival is one such festivity which brought people of different cultural backgrounds to Kuteb land. Celebrated on the 25th March annually, it is a thanksgiving and self-appraisal feast where Kuteb acknowledges the companionship and benevolence of the Supreme. Being in their existence, personality, success, failure and security. It is also a representation of the people as well as the embodiment of the totality of their way of life. It is also a demonstration of the people's behaviour and attitude towards one another and their ancestors. Kuchicheb among Kuteb people is an avenue where offences committed either against each other or against the ancestral spirits are purified and pardoned. In fact, the Kuchicheb festival was a tourist attraction in Kuteb land. But being one of the avenues where conflicts or ethnic clashes are kindled, the government of Taraba has put a ban on the festival. This festivity, which also represents the cultural identity of the Kuteb peoples, no longer holds. (Gangum 190)

Politically, Kirten activities have also influenced the manner of political association, as well as political orientation in Kuteb land. Their activities have heightened mistrust among the political class, both among Kuteb politicians and with other ethnic groups. All political actions are now interpreted based on ethnic inclination, whether it favours one ethnic group against the other. What this means is that the main drive for political participation in Kuteb land is for the achievement of primordial interest and not for the general good of the people. The multi-party system being practised in Nigeria today has further divided politicians. For instance, in the 2015 general election, Kuteb people were divided on the basis of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All-Progressive Congress (APC). While the PDP had Darius Dickson Ishaku as the party's gubernatorial candidate – a Chamba man – the APC had a Kuteb man as a running mate to the APC gubernatorial candidate Aisha Jummai Al-Hassan. The general feeling in Kuteb land was to see those in PDP as betrayals and had those in APC as those who were truly fighting the Kuteb cause. (Hassan)

This political division is now also reflected within the Kirten militia. Since their activities are mostly funded by politicians, they seem to be inclined to those who best represent them. The group is now contending with having to live above political differences or divide. These politicians who also fund the group have manipulated the militia group to suit their political interest, and most times it has affected the pursuit of the corporate goal of the militia group. One other impact of the Kirten Militia among the Kuteb is that it has built leadership in some of its members. What this means is that it has prepared members to take up roles in which they contribute to the growth and development of Kuteb land. This has also ensured that such members have been empowered economically, leading to improvements in living standards. Some have gone into politics and offered leadership. Danfulani Kwetaka, who was the one-time chairman of both Takum and Ussa local governments and one-time commissioner of works in Taraba State, is a case in point. (Hassan)

Kirten activities as represented by the crisis which they have prosecuted in Kuteb land have affected farmers’ output. During those crisis years, farm produce such as rice, maize sorghum, beans and groundnut output kept falling. This had effects on the income levels of people in the area, as the average annual income of households remained low throughout the period of instability. Incomes were below the poverty level of one dollar per day according to the United Nations standard. Business activities also suffered setbacks, which impacted negatively on economic activities in Kuteb land. The crisis destabilised most businesses, and the local governments lost a large share of revenue they would have generated from business ventures. For instance, figures from the two local governments during the 1997 crisis reveal a sharp fall in revenue. In 1997 Ussa Local Government recorded 255,157, while Takum had 403,000, giving a total of 758,157. In 1998 the two local governments had 708,632 as internally generated revenue, with Ussa posting 305,305 and Takum having 404,132. But by 1999, when the crisis had ended, the two

local governments had 6,518,426 as internally generated revenue, with Ussa having 3,106,309 and Takum having 3,412,117. (Ali et al. 312–13)

Table 1.1: showing revenue shortfall during crisis

Year	Ussa	Takum	Total
1996		5,011,171	5,011,171
1997	355,157	403,000	758,157
1998	305,305	404,132	709,632
1999	3,106,309	3,412,117	6,518,426
2000	3,200,309	4,612,279	7,812,588

Source: Ali A.Y et al

Table showing the internally generated revenue for Ussa and Takum Local Governments. Ussa had no figure for 1996 because it was created in 1997. It also showed the decline in revenue figures during the crisis period. Many farmers living in farm settlements have also failed to return to their homes due to the security situation involving farmers and herdsmen. By implication, it represents a threat to food security not only in Kuteb land but also in Taraba State and Nigeria as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Like most militia groups in Nigeria and other parts of the world, Kirten emerged due to the perception of injustice, marginalisation and failure of government at all levels to meet the yearnings and aspirations of Kuteb people in Taraba State, Nigeria. The underlining factors responsible for the various ethnic suspicions and eventual conflict, which include chieftaincy, boundary demarcation, land, and struggle for power, underscored a lack of effective leadership/governance and injustice in terms of the distribution of wealth and provision of security for the protection of the lives and property of the citizenry. Hence, instead of addressing the root issues, the state government resorted only to calming tensions and suspending violence, which has often recurred. Measures such as the deployment of military personnel and the establishment of both military and mobile bases are like the application of deodorant to mosquitos. Additionally, there is no clear distinction between militia members and government operatives. However, the socio-economic and political measures that could have contained the violence are not being implemented primarily due to political motivations, which are often driven by self-interest rather than what is right. This situation explains why the recommendations from various committees established by the government at all levels are not being implemented. For instance, most of the recommendations of the committees aimed at resolving the lingering crisis in Kuteb land remain unimplemented, and some bills, like the Anti-Open Grazing Bill at the Taraba State House of Assembly, remain stalled. This situation explains Kirten's continued existence, but politicians have hijacked it in various ways. As the saying goes, "He who pays the piper dictates the tune."

Thus, the state government and the federal government must take several measures to contain this menace in southern Taraba. The state and federal governments must guarantee effective governance and justice. We have seen how measures taken by governments at various times in the study represent sentiments in favour of one ethnic group or another for political reasons. If the state guarantees justice, Kirten or any other ethnic militia would become unnecessary. However, given the current realities, the government needs to recognise these militias and establish operational boundaries to prevent clashes between them and official security forces, as these militia groups have provided some form of security to the communities they represent despite their shortcomings. Times have changed, and circumstances around us are equally changing. Modern society no longer finds the age-old nomadism suitable, given the increased population and limited land resources. Thus, modern farm practices such as ranching as recommended by one of the committees need to be taken seriously so as to curb crop farmers' and herders' conflict. If we address all these measures, we can contain or eliminate the issue of arms proliferation. This study serves as a relevant resource on peace and security in southern Taraba and presents itself as an extension of the existing body of knowledge on security studies in Nigeria.

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