

NON-STATE SECURITY ACTORS AND THE IMPERATIVES OF PEACE: PROSPECT AND CHALLENGES OF "OPERATION AMOTEKUN" IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The need to safeguard the Nigerian state by plethora of security actors, both the state and non-state, turns out to be more compelling in Nigeria's social order as evident in various criminal activities ranging from Boko Haram insurgency, abduction, armed banditry, herders/farmers conflict, and money ritual to mention a few. The prevalence of insecurity spurs the agitation of Southwest Nigeria's governors to institutionalize a local security agency code named "Operation Amotekun" to safeguard the populace of the Southwest Nigeria which comprises Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti. Using primary and secondary data, the paper examines the prospect and challenges of the "Operation Amotekun" in the Southwest Nigeria. The study concludes that "Operation Amotekun" possesses the potential to play viable role in safeguarding lives and properties of Nigerians in the Southwest geo political zone. The piece therefore, recommends an uncompromising synergy between the Operation Amotekun and Nigeria Police Force in ensuring safety of lives and properties.

Keywords: Security, Actors, Non-State, Operation Amotekun, Regionalism, Nigeria

Introduction

Security of lives and properties is originally a selective duty that falls in capacity of government; cutting-across all layers of society (Iloh and Nwokedi, 2019). Nigeria has seen an extraordinary acceleration of violent clashes and various forms of criminalities since its return democratic rule in May 1999 (Irene 2016). The Nigerian government's dependence on formal security actors in handling these security challenges has been rendered insufficient, thereby prompting the deployment of the military in supplementing the efforts of other security agencies. The military and other security operatives have had issues adapting, and effectively handling the difficult security condition. This powerlessness of formal state security actors to sufficiently protect lives and properties, and effectively maintain public sanity have supported the emergence and multiplicity of non-state security actors in Nigeria (Adigwe 2013).

The frequent occurrence of social violations, such as banditry, theft, kidnapping among other vicious acts, required the revitalization of non-formal ways to deal with the security of lives and properties (Hazen and Honar, 2007). Arrangements among group of people within a community were observable as a casual reaction to criminal dangers, for example, robbery, pot-burglary, and home-breaking cases (Irene, 2016). The persistent violations of human security likewise spurred the emergence of community security initiatives, as an idea, which

though evident, has not so much enjoyed scholarly debates (Odewale and Lamidi 2020). In addition, criminalities in various forms and networks instigates the current discussion on grassroot-network policing across states in Nigeria with some brisk development, for example, Hisbah police in the Northern Nigeria. All the more particularly, the police-network connection advisory group is a standing unit for communications and tasks of common security issues (Ifeoma, 2020).

In Southwest Nigeria, most pronounced non-formal security networks are the vigilante groups of Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC). Despite these outfits, high predominance of hijacking along interstates, farmland attack by herders, bank robbery in Southwest Nigeria called for local drive of the security initiative dedicated Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) with a code-name of Amotekun (Akinwunmi, 2020). The "Amotekun" signifies panther or leopard in the Yoruba language, and is an operational terminology for the (WNSN) launched on Thursday 9th January 2020. The panther/leopard represents quality, persistence, aspiration, freedom, sturdiness, industriousness, understanding and mental fortitude. Amotekun/Leopard is in like manner known for its amazing pursuing behavior and leopard its camouflage ability that enables it to protect its domain from interlopers. WNSN as a regional security framework is purposed to combat crimes in the area which involves Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun,

Ondo, and Ekiti states (*Ibid*). The outfit would work to complement the state security operatives, for instance, Nigeria Police Force (NPF), NSCDC, among other state security establishments (Odewale and Lamidi, 2020).

At the beginning, the Southwest security network has attracted diverse appraisals; some commend while others disapprove it. The Northern Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN) feared and criticised the informal security initiative as militant group of Oodua People's Congress (OPC) (The Eagle Online, 2020). The Attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and the Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami announced the outfit as unlawful on the unlawful ground that the police is the constitutionally authorized agents to provide security of lives and properties. Southwest prominent, Chief Afe Babalola (SAN) and Femi Falana (SAN) had in like manner condemned the declaration of the AGF as ultra-vires that is the AGF doesn't have the legal provision to label the initiative as unlawful (Daily Trust, 2020). Some similarly criticised that the Southwest regional security network is an attempt to create State Police since the Federal Government is reluctant to accede to the demand for such. Herdersmen in the region thinks the Operation Amotekun is a reprisal formation against them in the region (Vanguard, 2020).

The Federal Government in like manner fears that the creation of Amotekun, would likely lay a perspective for various zones to participate in such action, and honestly or by suggestion threatening the solidarity of the Nigeria state. Despite these mixed slants, this paper uncover the rationale for creating Operation Amotekun, with the ultimate objective of giving information on the possibilities and challenges of providing quality regional security services to communities in the Southwest Nigeria (Vanguard, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of regionalism is at the focal point of examining the objectives of regional security networks in Nigeria. Regionalism is multidimensional and would require conceptual explanation to better situate the theory around the regionalization of Non state security outfits in Nigeria. The idea of

regionalism and sub-regionalism has pulled in gigantic consideration of the scholarly world just as analysts in contemporary politics and international relations. This is because of the way that the enduring quest for regionalism and sub-regionalism has a supporting push for harmony, security and advancement through investigation, recognizable proof and continuous heightening of trade, economic, financial and social ties among the geologically contiguous regions. Regionalism has acquired noticeable quality in the 21st century, not just as a type of financial, political and social association, yet in addition as a field of study.

The discussion on ascent of regionalism shows that we need to have a crystal understanding of what we mean by regionalism. Regionalism is a belief system and political development that tries to advance the yearnings of a group of people similar in many ways. Be that as it may, it is vital, at the very beginning, to recognize two very various implications of the term regionalism. At the global level, regionalism alludes to transnational participation to accomplish a shared objective or resolve a shared issue or it alludes to a group of countries, for example, Western Europe, the Western Balkans, or Southeast Asia, that are connected by geography, history or economic and monetary highlights. Utilized in this sense, regionalism alludes to endeavors to strengthen the connections between these nations. Today, the first illustration of such an endeavor is the European Union (EU) (Bevir, 2009).

The second significance of the term is regionalism alludes to an interaction where sub-state players/actors become progressively powerful, autonomous and free of the state. In this instance, power devolves from the central to state to local governments with a country. As such, it refers to a domain that is situated inside a nation-state or in some cases across the lines of a country. In this sense, various types of regions might be recognized: political areas, which as a rule have some type of regional government; administrative areas, which are topographical elements made to regulate different sectors, for example, health, electricity and energy generation; security (Loughlin, 2007:939).

Operation Amotekun is a regional security outfit which the Southwest geopolitical leaders of Lagos,

Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti have decided to collectively instituted for better security. Though operation amotekun is a regional issue, each state is designed to operate in units. The local government organ would be charged to coordinate the activities in its localities. Each local government will report issues and progress to the state command. The six-state commands will then connect the regional command in that order. The operation of the regional command will be coordinated from the central in Ibadan, Oyo state. The operational base is domiciled in Gbogan, Osun state, and in close collaboration with the Developmental Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission, as it provides administrative supervision for the initiative. Commissioner of police in each state is determined to oversee security activities in each of the states. Security trust fund would be in place to foot the bill of this agency, under the supervision of the Commissioner of police. Each state in the region is expected to recruit the number of personnel in accordance with their capacity.

The necessity of policing by all actors, both the state and non-state actors becomes even more evident in Nigeria societies characterized by diverse insecurities vices range from Boko-haram insurgency, kidnapping, armed robbery, herdsmen/farmer clash, ritual killing, etc. Ikuteyijo (2008) also attests to the fact police in the different parts of Nigeria have been found wanting in the responsibility of securing lives and properties, especially in regard to combating criminality, hence the underlying reason for the agitations of the southwestern Nigerian leaders for Operation Amotekun. The idea that security is more of an indigenous phenomenon, and that criminality is strange to Yoruba citizens informed the effort to create an indigenous security network in the southwest region of Nigeria

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive research design. The population consists of members of the non-state security outfits in Nigeria i.e vigilante Group of Nigeria, Civilian Joint Task Force, Neighbourhood Watch etc. A sample of one hundred (100) respondents for the study comprises of member and

frontiers of the "Operation Amotekun" in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Ondo, Ekiti States. Twenty respondents in the informal security outfits were randomly selected from each state.

Quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis are employed for the study. Quantitative study deals with distribution of questionnaires to elicit information and analysis of data. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency distribution, percentages and content analysis. Qualitative method relies on the information gathered from secondary sources such as books, newspaper articles, journals publications, textbooks, monographs etc

Discussion of Findings

Prospect of "Operation Amotekun" in Southwest Nigeria

(a) Political Support for Amotekun Security Network

The majority comprising 35% and 57% respondents agree and strongly agree that the prospect of "Operation Amotekun" rests on the political support it has been able to secure among political leaders especially in the Southwest region. 4% of the respondents are indifferent about the political support while 4% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree on the political support for "Operation Amotekun" in the Southwest. The rate of crime - grabbing, house attacks, and theft, kidnapping, burglary etc. in Southwest Nigeria (Yoruba land) is alarming. On January 9, the Governors of the six states in the Southwest declared the foundation of "Operation Amotekun" ("Leopard" in the English language).

The evident objective of Operation Amotekun is to help and supplement the public police administration, yet not supplant it. While Abubakar Malami, the Attorney General, proclaimed the gathering illicit, the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo has since shown support for Operation Amotekun. (President Muhammadu Buhari was out of the nation at that point.) Yoruba customary rulers, driven by the Ooni of Ife, voiced their backings for the non-state security initiative (Daily Trust, 2020).

(b) Complimentary Role with Formal Security Agencies

On the prospect of playing complimentary role with the formal security agencies 32% and 64% agree and strongly agreed 2% indifference while 2 respondents disagree and strongly disagree. The frontiers of the security outfit expressed that it was intended to help, as opposed to sabotage government security administrations. Security and wellbeing of our kin is opined as essential enthusiasm that informs the "Operation Amotekun". Contrasted with "Neighborhood Watch," "Operation Amotekun" and its organization is established to share data and intelligence with the police, which additionally incorporated an early-cautioning framework (Odewale and Lamidi, 2020). In spite of the fact that condemned for its uniforms and custom vehicles, which creates the perception of a defence force, it is obvious that "Operation Amotekun" receives the support of the southwest governors. Governors of the Southwest region of Nigeria have vowed to gracefully financing from the state depository to help the non-State security activity (*Ibid*).

In the Nigeria security design, the security outfit that appear nearer to the individuals and communities is the police force as there is no state or nearby police force. Since the colonial era, there has been worry that neighborhood policing could bring about ethnic disharmony. In principle, if not practically speaking, public cops are deployed outside the locality from which they come. Be that as it may, with the overall breakdown of security all through the nation, there is an exuberant discussion over the benefits of building up a type of community policing (Campbell, 2020). This is essential for a bigger discussion on the devolution of more capacity to state and grassroots governments.

There is additional acknowledgment that the public police are undertrained, underfunded, and excessively few in numbers. Subsequently, the activity would likewise fill in as a cycle of building organizations in the locale, and in the nation as a whole. More-thus, the outfit likewise mirrors the way toward building regional integration that represent genuine federalism which has eluded the country for a considerable length of time (*Ibid*).

(c) Effective Grassroots Policing

Respondents representing 37% and 54% agree and strongly agree that Operation Amotekun will foster effective grassroots policing. 2% of the respondents are indifferent about. 3% and 4% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree that "Operation Amotekun" will enhance effective security at the grassroots level. Security responsibility to the general population would increase at the grassroots due to the association in the security. Regional and grassroots policing involves a collaboration of endeavours between the police and the neighbourhood vigilante; which can engender security accountability (Ikuteyijo 2008).

Amotekun network would additionally connect the police and the individual members of Southwest communities together. The organization that creates after some time can at last assist the police force in discovering the fundamental reasons for crimes in a particular area. By working with the regional operation Amotekun, the police have more assets accessible to them to help in intercepting criminal activities. By acquainting themselves with the individual officers from the Amotekun network, Police officers are bound to acquire significant data about crooks and their exercises (Goddey, 2018).

Likewise they are bound to acquire a solid assessment of the requirements of residents and their desires for the police. It would get simpler as traditional institutional leadership is more helpful in handling the security of the region, as closeness exist between the office and the customary ruler. The activity would increase the level of trust that individual have for the governments (state and federal) in securing the lives and properties. It would probably diminish the criminal activities in the locals of the states that comprise the southwest region. It might fill in as a decent format to adopt by other geopolitical regions in Nigeria in fighting crimes (*Ibid*).

(d) Enhancing Police-Community Relations

The respondents also view "Operation Amotekun" as important for police-community relations as 28% and 68% of the respondents who agree and strongly agree while 2% respondents is indifferent, 2% and 0% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree. Operation Amotekun can unite

police and locals to combat crime and tackle neighbourhood issues. With operation Amotekun, it is possible to halt crimes before they occur, as such reacting to calls after the diverse crimes happen. Operation Amotekun will give residents more opportunity to enjoy personal satisfaction regarding the security of their locale.

Amotekun policing implies security effort becoming part of the southwest communities in Nigeria (Emeka and Nwokedi, 2019). The regional initiative will assist police with improving feeling of occupant's needs and causes inhabitants to create more noteworthy trust in the police. Those who accept that Amotekun policing in the neighborhood are bound to communicate ideal assessments of the police to the general public (Weitzer and Tuch, 2006). Amotekun network and the police force can cooperate to accomplish a shared objective of a more secure, better spot to live.

Amotekun policing if managed very can be a successful method to elevate open wellbeing and to improve the personal satisfaction in communities of the Southwest region in Nigeria. Amotekun operation has the potential of assuming a crucial part in the two significant components of policing: Nigeria Police-community relations and insecurity (Wroblewski and Hess, 2003). Police-Community relations as enhanced by Operation Amotekun would widen police overarching objectives of security responsibilities. Second, it ought to change the manner in which police are composed to achieve their objectives. Actualizing community base security initiative in Southwest Nigeria in the form of Amotekun Operation changes the style and management of policing Southwest communities (Ibid).

(e) Community Participation in Security Issues

"Operation Amotekun" to encouraging community participation has been favoured by 36% and 58% of the respondents who agree and strongly agree while 0 respondents is indifferent, 4% and 2% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree. With any strategy for Amotekun policing there will be points of interest. One of the fundamental points of interest to Amotekun policing is that it dwindles fear in the community. By bringing security operation

close to the grassroots communities, the people will have a sense of safety (Adishi and Gbenemene, 2017).

As residents participate more in security issues in their locale, they would better comprehend what police force really do on an everyday premise. This improves police-amotekun relations. Another preferred position in looking at the prospect of the Southwest security initiative is that Amotekun policing would be adaptable and fit for evolving (Muluken, 2019). The arrangements and procedures can be easily changed as the network changes to suit the security situation of communities from time to time.

Although that an arrangement works in a state within the southwest region doesn't imply that it will work in other states. Amotekun operation can easily cooperate with members of local communities to concoct arrangements that will work inside their own neighborhood and to change or dispose of those that don't work. Amotekun Network policing offers a bunch of advantages. Utilizing the abilities and assets accessible in the hinterlands will help the police force to effectively discharge their national role of security provision (Ibid).

Challenges of Operation Amotekun

"Operation Amotekun" would have been pointless if there had been effective policing in the country. The Southwest security framework became fundamental when the individuals in the region got helpless against assaults by individuals they know as strangers.

They additionally accept that the state security agents are aliens and don't have a clue about the landscape. Amotekun is locally situated and comprehends the territory. It is an essential effort for the southwest Nigeria sanity (Vanguard, 2020).

a. Autonomy and Inter-Security Agents Clash

The majority combines 33% and 61% respondents who agree and strongly agree that autonomy and formal – informal Clash will be a challenge for the "Operation Amotekun" in the Southwest region. 5% of the respondents are indifferent about the autonomy and possible clash while 1% of the respondents disagree and 0% strongly disagrees. The primary setback is that the

issue of the autonomy for the operation Amotekun may culminate in clash with state security actors.

The viewpoint that, the Amotekun should operate freely in southwest states and relate territorially may cause struggle among the levels of government and other security offices. Thus the Police, NSCDC and the Army may consider "Operation Amotekun" a rival. They may consider them to be outshining the state security agents. The consequence of working in opposite direction is inevitable through miscommunication. In the event of clash between that the security forces and Amotekun agents, the goals may be ruined (The Guardian, 2020).

b. Adequate Training for Recruits

On the recruits getting adequate training 35% and 63% agree and strongly agreed, 1% indifference while 0% respondents disagree and 1% strongly disagrees that getting adequate training would be a challenge. Once more, there is the issue of satisfactory training and firepower as well as the security of the Amotekun agents themselves. The Inspector General of Police expressly stated that there are sure classes of arms that won't be found with the Amotekun.

Hence, they might not be able to match the sophistication of the herders with predominant firepower. They may likewise confront the funding difficulties. The South West governors face a ton of financial dilemma. In the event that they are not paid by the Federal government, the Amotekun agents may become lawbreakers themselves (Punch, 2020).

c. Fear of Dismemberment

Respondents representing 40% and 55% agree and strongly agree that the fear of dismemberment of Nigeria will hamper the activities of Operation Amotekun. 3% of the respondents are indifferent. 1% and 1% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree. The way that the southwest geopolitical zone has been at the bleeding edge of the formation of state police in Nigeria, instigate fear, particularly from Northern region, that "Operation Amotekun" activity looks like an indirect effort for the southwest to accomplish state police. "Operation Amotekun" is in danger of unnecessary meddling from

Northern 'big heads' who fear that institutionalisation of state security network would result in the dismemberment of the Nigerian state (Akinwunmi, 2020).

d. Tool for Personal Discord

That "Operation Amotekun" will be vulnerable to be used as tool for settling personal discord is also evident in 28% and 68% of the respondents who agree and strongly agree while 2% respondents is indifferent, 2% and 0% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree. If not cautioned, recruits of the "Operation Amotekun" might see themselves as 'security lords' who can do and undo. Uncultured agents might take laws in to their hands; using the "Operation Amotekun" platform as tool for settling personal discord, revenge and/or vengeance, oppression and intimidation of the general public (*Ibid*).

This envisaged challenge stem from the experience with Yoruba cultural non state organisation that have caused troubles in Southwest Nigeria until cautioned. Same way, some members of the Oodua People Congress had been deployed overtime as political thugs, the members of Operation Amotekun if not well paid, well furnished, well catered for, well psychologically oriented might be easily manipulated by political "machiavellians" who believe the end justify the means instead of respecting the sanctity of the purpose of creating Operation Amotekun (Muluken, 2019).

e. Lack of Prosecutorial Power

The lack of capacity to prosecute criminals have also been identified as a possible challenge to "Operation Amotekun" as 37% agree, 58% strongly agree, 1% indifferent, 1% and 3% disagree and strongly disagree. The lack of capacity to prosecute arrested criminal is a clog in the wheel of Amotekun operation in the Southwest Nigeria. This is a challenge as it slows the pace of the corps.

This hampers the operation Amotekun from punishing offenders. Instance is the case of Chinese arrested at illegal mining sites were granted administrative bail and were never arraigned (The Punch, 2020).

Policy Recommendation

It is glaring that the government and its security agencies have failed woefully in providing adequate security for the citizens. Several reasons account for the failure; corruption, weak firepower, poverty and the most notable reason is the inadequate manpower such that hinterlands in Nigeria communities are marginalised or better put are excluded from the protection of state security. Communities which are not properly secured are victims of armed robbery, armed banditry, herders/farmers conflict, kidnapping and theft. The lack of protection of those communities is evident in the delayed response of the police force when called upon to intercept or interrupt any criminal operations. The security officers usually showed up hours after the incidence that members of the communities are terrorised, robbed, maimed or killed. The need for non state security actors in Nigeria is non-negotiable, particularly, "Operation Amotekun" in the Southwest Nigeria where peace daily eludes the communities within the region.

The existence and operations of "Operation Amotekun" holds promise and potentials, but certainly not without risks and challenges that could endanger national security. Therefore, the articulation of a strategic framework for robust engagement with non state security initiative is sine qua non for sustainable security in Nigeria. The study recommends that legal framework is important in ensuring that Amotekun initiative is properly regulated and made to be accountable; funding of "Operation Amotekun" should be made statutory, making them sustainable and uneasy to manipulate for political thuggery.

Though recruitment into "Operation Amotekun" is voluntary, biodata of its members should be collected and stored for references to prevent impersonation for any form of criminal act. Close collaboration between the state security actors and the Amotekun players should be made compulsory. To optimise the contributions of "Operation Amotekun" to national security, the study recommends, among others, the enactment of a national legislation to regulate the activities of non-state security initiative. The need for Community Security Fund to ensure a more reliable and transparent funding of "Operation Amotekun" cannot

be over emphasised. Capacity building programme and orientation for members of 'Operation Amotekun' is important to prevent human right violation.

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