

REGIONAL SECURITY INITIATIVE AND THE SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: THE CASE OF OPERATION AMOTEKUN

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Abstract

It is no longer news that the Federal Republic of Nigeria is currently faced with increasing security challenges in its six geopolitical zones. In South West Nigeria, a region that is home to millions of Nigerians, predominantly Yorubas who share common ancestry, beliefs, values and culture, are reoccurring security challenges – ritual killings, Fulani herdsman-farmers clash, armed robbery, kidnapping among others. Over the years, the underfunded, understaffed and overstretched Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has been unable to stamp out the aforementioned crimes in the region. Hence, the governors of the six states in the region – Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo State, having rubbed minds, launched a regional security initiative – ‘Operation Amotekun’ in January of 2020 to complement the efforts of the police. This paper takes a critical look at the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) codenamed ‘Operation Amotekun’ as the region’s security initiative in addressing the myriad security challenges bedevilling the region. For the study, data were garnered from secondary sources, and the Social Contract Theory was adopted as the tool of analysis. The paper concludes that the laudable Amotekun Corps is a ray of hope for the people of South West Nigeria that the spate of armed robbery, kidnappings, ritual killings and the likes will be reduced to a bare minimum if not become a thing of the past in coming years.

Keywords: Nigeria Police Force, Operation Amotekun, Regional Security Initiative, Security Outfit, South West Nigeria

Introduction

The protection of human lives and property remains a primary responsibility of state governments the world over, be they democratic or autocratic. It is no wonder that ‘security’ is among the sectors critically examined by pundits when appraising a government’s performance over a given period.

In the Nigerian State, burgeoning security challenges in the six geopolitical zones of the country has in time past and recent years left tens of thousands of unarmed civilians dead and property worth millions of naira, destroyed. Beginning from 2009, North East Nigeria has been the epicentre of Boko Haram insurgency and the attendant humanitarian crisis in the region. In North Central, herders and farmers clash is occasionally reported in Benue and Plateau State. North West of the country is not any better, as armed banditry is well pronounced in Zamfara State while infrequent clashes with tribal and religious colouration, do rear its ugly head in Kaduna State where the Muslims are the majority in Northern Kaduna and in Southern Kaduna, a preponderant Christian population. In the oil-rich South South region, militancy is still very much alive, while kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, secessionist movement, and farmer-herdsmen clash are common incidents in South East Nigeria.

In the face of the abovementioned insecurity situations in parts of the country, and kidnappings, armed robbery, farmers-herders clash, and ritual killings in the South West region, is the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which is underfunded, understaffed and overstretched in the discharge of their core mandate of maintaining law and order, and protecting lives and property. Thus, state governors and groups within the Nigerian Federation began to float regional security initiatives to complement the efforts of the police and other conventional security agencies.

In South West Nigeria, the governors of the six states therein collaboratively came up with the security outfit codenamed ‘Operation Amotekun’ (Yoruba: meaning ‘Leopard’) which was launched early January, 2020, in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State. No sooner had they done this than the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG) unveiled a ferocious Lion as the symbol of the Northern Nigeria Security Initiative ‘Shege-Ka-Fasa’ (Hausa: meaning, ‘I dare you’) in Kaduna State on the 5th of February, 2020 (Enyiocha and Idowu, 2020; Isenyo, 2020; Hassan, 2020). In South East Nigeria, the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, suggested a security outfit for the region, which could be codenamed ‘Operation Ogbunigwe’ (Punch, 2020a).

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the regional security initiative ‘Operation Amotekun’ as a panacea to the security challenges in South West Nigeria. To achieve this, the paper has been compartmentalised into the following sub-headings: research methodology, theoretical framework, an overview of the insecurity situation in South West Nigeria, regional security initiative and the security challenges in Nigeria: the case of operation amotekun, the Nigerian constitution and the legality of operation amotekun, conclusion, and lastly, recommendations.

Research Methodology

The research method adopted for this study is, the qualitative method. This research method entails the gathering of data from secondary sources – journal articles, literatures, newspapers, online articles, work papers, unpublished theses etc.

Evidently, the launch of the regional security initiative ‘Operation Amotekun’ is a new and welcome development *vis-à-vis* addressing the security challenges spreading in South West Nigeria. Hence, data collected and analysed in this paper were largely gotten from online newspapers.

Theoretical Framework

The theme ‘Regional Security Initiative and the Security Challenges in Nigeria: The Case of Operation Amotekun’ is one that can be analysed with one or two theories in the social sciences. For this study, the Social Contract Theory was adopted.

The Social Contract Theory (SCT) is one out of five well-known theories of the origin of the state (Ogunnoiki, 2018: 118). The progenitors of this theory remain the Englishmen – Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704), and the Swiss-born political philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). For this paper, only the argument of Thomas Hobbes will be employed.

Thomas Hobbes theory of the origin of the state was to a great extent shaped by the happenings in England in the mid-17th century. Having witnessed the English Civil War (1642-1651) which was precipitated by the discord between the monarch, King Charles I, and the Parliamentarians, Thomas Hobbes in the year 1651 published the *Leviathan* (the name of a sea monster in the Holy Bible, see Job 41: 1-34; Psalms 74: 14; Isaiah 27: 1). In his classic albeit fictional book, Hobbes tried to justify the idea of an inviolable absolute sovereign that is capable of maintaining law and order in a state. He began by painting a gloomy picture of the state of nature which is a corollary

of his concept of the human nature, that all men are equal in mind and body. According to Hobbes, man by nature is a selfish being. His actions in a state of nature are not guided by his intellect or reason but appetites, desires and passions (Mukhi, n.d.: 423; Appadorai, 1968: 21-22; Gauba, 2003: 181-182).

Living in a state of nature, men were in a perpetual struggle, ceaseless conflict, and a condition called 'Warre', where every man was against every man, and the life of men was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" as there was no common authority over them. There was no morality in the state of nature, and industry among other things was practically impossible owing to the psychological fear of violent death. Three things according to Hobbes are the main causes of the condition of 'Warre': i) competition, ii) diffidence, and iii) love of glory. Hence, men that pursued self-preservation decided to exit the state of nature and found a society and state by concluding a social contract among themselves. By finalising the social contract which is an agreement that cannot be revoked by the people or their descendants, the people relinquished all their natural rights and powers to an absolute sovereign who is a product of their covenant because, according to Hobbes, "[c]ovenants, without the sword, are but words and of no strength to secure a man at all." Being a creation of the people's social contract, the absolute sovereign (who can eventually become a despot owing to unchecked powers) cannot at any time be accused of breaching the so-called contract since the sovereign is not a party to the agreement. In the newly formed state, the primary business of the absolute sovereign is to maintain law and order, and ensure the security of all (Mukhi, n.d.: 423-434; Appadorai, 1968: 22; Gauba, 2003: 182-184).

Hobbes Social Contract Theory like other theories of the origin of the state, has not been spared of criticism. To theologians and conservatives, Hobbes Social Contract Theory of the origin of the state buries a centuries-old belief. For years, men and women of faith in the supernatural being, God, have believed a reigning monarch enjoys the divine right to rule. To them, he/she on the throne is not accountable to the people but to God from who the divine right to rule stem from. This was not taken into account in Hobbes proposition. In place of the 'divine right to rule' argument, Hobbes states that the absolute sovereign is in power by the will and consent of the people, who fleeing the state of nature, reached an agreement to surrender their rights and powers to the sovereign. In other words, the state is not a creation of God, and there is nothing mystical about it (see Mukhi, n.d.: 449-450). Secondly, Hobbesian Social Contract Theory has been faulted

for the lacuna in the chain of his argument. According to Thomas Hobbes, human action in a state of nature was determined by appetites, desires and passions (Gaubas, 2003: 182). How come the savages abruptly became rational beings, capable of reaching peacefully a consensus for their mutual interest of security? is a question left unanswered by Hobbes. Lastly, Hobbesian state of nature, which brutes lived in, cannot be proven with historical evidence. Hence, a number of critics are in agreement that the horrendous state of nature Hobbes wrote about only existed within the walls of his imagination which he penned down in black and white in support of having an inalienable absolute sovereign.

Despite his theoretical shortcomings, Hobbes proposition to date is still used in the discourse of domestic and international security. Security wise, Nigeria, though a post-colonial state, can be examined with some of the assumptions of Thomas Hobbes. The Federal Republic of Nigeria operates a three-tier of government, and the 1999 Constitution (as amended) explicitly states that the onus of protecting lives and property rests on the government. Unfortunately, the Nigeria Police Force, being part of the executive arm of government, has been unable to single-handedly tackle the security challenges in the country that currently resembles the imaginary ‘state of nature’ Hobbes wrote about centuries ago. Thus the need for regional security initiatives arose, especially in South West Nigeria, to complement the efforts of the police in eradicating the prevalent ritual killings, kidnappings, armed robbery among others.

An Overview of the Insecurity Situation in South West Nigeria

The South West region of Nigeria comprises of six states – Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo State which are geographically contiguous and share similar culture, beliefs, values and language. From 2015 to date, the insecurity situation in South West Nigeria has gone from bad to worse. Operating on several major highways in the region are suspected herdsmen, armed robbers, kidnappers and ritualists. The Akure-Owo-Oba Akoko-Akungba, Ondo-Ore, Ilesha-Oshogbo, Ipele-Ido Ani, Ife-Ibadan, Ilaro-Owode-Idi-Iroko, Ijebu Igbo-Oru-Awa, Abeokuta-Lagos roads to mention a few have become unsafe for commuters to ply on owing to the rising criminal activities that take place there on a regular basis (Amaize et al., 2019).

On Monday, 21st of September, 2015, Chief Olu Falae, a former Finance Minister and presidential aspirant, farmland in Ilado village, Akure, Ondo State, was not only attacked by Fulani herdsmen but he was abducted, on his 77th birthday. Many of his workers including the farm manager were

macheted while others were reportedly wounded and admitted in different hospitals (Johnson, 2015). He (Chief Falae) was released three days after by the herdsmen after a 5 million naira ransom was paid (Johnson, 2017a). Again, his farm was attacked in April 2016. This time around, his security guard, Ayodele Ige, was killed in the process (Baiyewu and Akinloye, 2016). It was not until April 2017, that the Ondo State High Court sentenced seven of the apprehended herdsmen who abducted the elder statesman in 2015, to life imprisonment (Johnson, 2017a).

In April 2017, the Akure-Ilesha highway reportedly became a death trap due to the activities of armed robbers, kidnappers and herdsmen on the road who rob, kidnap, maim, rape, kill, and dispossess motorists and their passengers of their hard earned money and personal effects. The Managing Director of Daily Times Newspaper, Adinoyin Ojo Onukaba, who was returning from the former president, Olusegun Obasanjo's Presidential Library launch in Abeokuta, Ogun State, died around Ero village, just before Ilara Mokin in Ifedore Council area of Ondo State, after his vehicle ran into robbers in one of their operations. Also, a top banker with one of the new generation banks in Akure, Ondo State, Mr Sola Abe, was murdered by hoodlums on the same highway as he journeyed to Lagos alongside his driver, on official duty. His lifeless body was found three days later in the bush between Igbara Oke/Ilara Mokin in Ifedore Council area. His driver survived the incident, though with bullets lodged in his body and was in a critical condition at the hospital for weeks (Johnson, 2017b).

In May 2019, the President of the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE), Col. S. Ade Agbede (Rtd) disclosed that there are about 1,123 cells belonging to armed herdsmen who perpetrate their nefarious activities across the length and breadth of Yorubaland (Johnson and Akinrefon, 2019). In June 2019, a 25-year-old woman, Mrs Olawunmi Adeleye, and her stepson, Destiny Paul, aged 14 years, were kidnapped by unknown gunmen at Osi community along Akure airport road while returning from church service. Their abductors, according to a family source, placed a ransom of 10 million naira on them. In the same month, the Ondo State Governor, Arakunrin Rotimi Akeredolu disclosed that a gang of kidnappers attacked his convoy on the Akure-Ibadan expressway. It took the proactive response of his security detail to scare them away with gunshots in the air (Akingboye, 2019).

Perhaps the incident that drew public attention to the worrisome insecurity situation in the South West region was the killing of the 58-year-old, Mrs Funke Olakunrin by suspected herdsmen. Mrs

Funke Olakunrin, the daughter of Pa Reuben Fasoranti, the national leader of the Yoruba socio-cultural group, Afenifere, was killed on her way to Ore junction from Akure on July 12, 2019 (Vanguard, 2019). On April 03, 2020, suspected herdsmen invaded a farm settlement in Arimogija in Ose local government area of Ondo State and killed a rice farmer, Jacob Odushe, his son, Adura, and another boy by the name Victor Ejeh (Johnson, 2020).

Across the states in the South West region, clashes between farmers and herdsmen are rampant with resultant loss of human lives and investments. In Oyo State for instance, farmers in Saki and Iseyin towns of Oke-Ogun do intermittently clash with the Fulani pastoralists over the encroachment of brazen cattle on their farmland (see Olaniyi, 2015). Thus on the 29th of August, 2016, the former Ekiti State governor, Mr Ayo Fayose, signed the Anti-Grazing Bill into law which prohibited grazing in some places and at certain time in the state (Punch, 2016).

While the Ekiti State anti-grazing law addressed just an aspect of the insecurity question within its border, the greater security challenges of armed robbery, kidnapping, and ritual killings within South West Nigeria requires a concerted effort in order to stem the tide of insecurity in the region.

Regional Security Initiative and the Security Challenges in Nigeria: The Case of Operation Amotekun

In the political arena of the Nigerian State, the first quarter of 2020 will be remembered as a period several regional security initiatives were floated along ethnic lines. In Northern Nigeria, operation ‘Shege-Ka-Fasa’ was rejected by the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Muhammad Sa’ad Abubakar III, and the states governors in the region following the unveiling of the security initiative by the spokesman of the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG), Mr Abdul-Azeez Suleiman. Several reasons were given for opposing the proposed security outfit, one of which is, its abysmal nomenclature (This Day, 2020).

In South East Nigeria, the President-General of the supreme Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, in person of Chief Nnia Nwodo, made an appeal to the Federal Government to permit the setting up of the security initiative ‘Operation Ogbunigwe’ which would tackle the security threats in the region e.g. armed Fulani pastoralists whose cattle boldly trespass on farmlands, feed on and destroy valuable crops (Ede, 2020). To date, the only regional security

architecture put forward recently that has come to fruition is ‘Operation Amotekun’ in South West Nigeria.

In the year 2019, high-level meetings and deliberations were made by the governors of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, and Ondo State and stakeholders in South West Nigeria *vis-à-vis* addressing the insecurity situation in the region. On the 9th of January, 2020, at Ibadan, Oyo State, the South West governors launched the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) codenamed ‘Operation Amotekun’ which the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission helped in birthing. The said security outfit will take-off with 120 Pick-up Vans (20 each for the six states in the region) which are equipped with communication gadgets, and one hundred motorcycles (Feyisipo, 2020; PM News, 2020).

At the launch, Ekiti State governor, Dr Kayode Fayemi, dispelled rumours making the rounds that the new security network is a regional police. Left to him, Amotekun is nothing but a “confidence-building strategy” and most importantly, about community policing that will not only complement the work of mainstream security agencies in the country which he commended, though according to him are “overstretched”, but will reduce the burden on them (Feyisipo, 2020; PM News, 2020). In his words:

“Amotekun is not a duplication neither is it a replacement for the Nigeria Police Force. Amotekun is a complement that gives our people the confidence that they are being looked after by the people they elected into office. We do not want this to create fear in the mind of any one. We are not creating a regional police force. We are not oblivious of the steps we need to follow in forming a State police. We are law abiding citizens of Nigeria. We know that will require a constitutional amendment and we are not there yet” (PM News, 2020).

On the 4th of August, 2020, the government of the Oyo State governor, Seyi Makinde, approved the sum of 59.7 million naira as grant for the take-off of ‘Operation Amotekun’ in the state (Adeniran, 2020). Seven days after, Ondo State governor, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu, inaugurated the pioneering officers of the Amotekun Corps who just completed their training in Akure, the state capital (Channels Television, 2020). Almost a month after their inauguration, the Corps made the news. On the 3rd of September, 2020, men of the Amotekun Corps arrested three members of

a kidnap syndicate, which according to an eye witness are Fulani herdsmen, after abducting a popular businessman, Mr Kunle Agbayewa, in a popular saw-mill in Idoani, Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State. According to the Commander of Amotekun Corps in the state, Mr Adetunji Adeleye, the victim was rescued and the three apprehended kidnappers have been handed over to the state police command for further investigation and prosecution (Gbadamosi, 2020).

Once again, Chief Olu Falae's farmland at Ilado village in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State, reportedly came under attack by suspected herdsmen. In November 2020, Chief Olu Falae's maize and citrus farms which worth millions of naira, were set ablaze by suspected herdsmen who allegedly attacked the workers on the farms. Chief Olu Falae has called on the police and Amotekun to come to his aid (Otabor, 2020).

The Nigerian Constitution and the Legality of Operation Amotekun

With a prancing and angry Leopard as its logo, the lauded Amotekun Corps will have zero tolerance to criminal activities in the region (Egbas, 2020). This will only be achievable after the said Corps is formally established based on a legal framework.

In Part III of Chapter VI, Section 214 (1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) states that "There shall be a police force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section no other police force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof." Going by this section of the constitution alone, the setting up of the Amotekun Corps is technically unconstitutional. However, as stated in Chapter II, Section 14 (2) (b) of the said constitution, "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". The word "government" here, as interpreted in Section 318 (1) under Part IV of Chapter VIII, "includes the Government of the Federation, or of any state, or of a local government council or any person who exercises power of authority on its behalf;" (WIPO, n.d.). Hence, the onus is on the governors of South West states to take appropriate measures in safeguarding the lives and property within their jurisdiction.

In a statement made public on the 14th of January, 2020, through his Special Adviser on Media and Public Relations, Dr Umar Jibrilu Gwandu, the Attorney-General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, Mr Abubakar Malami (SAN) said:

“The setting up of the paramilitary organization called “Amotekun” is illegal and runs contrary to the provisions of the Nigerian law. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) has established the Army, Navy and Airforce, including the Police and other numerous paramilitary organisations for the purpose of the defence of Nigeria.” (Daniel, 2020)

He finally added that, had the South West governors approached his office, they would have been given “proper information and guidance” on founding the security outfit (Daniel, 2020; Nmodu, 2020). Following the AGF declaration on Operation Amotekun as an unlawful paramilitary organisation, were divergent reactions from prominent persons and legal luminaries in South West Nigeria such as the Aare Onakakanfo of Yorubaland, Chief Gani Adams, and the outspoken human rights lawyer, Mr Femi Falana (SAN).

Respectfully, Mr Falana stated that Mr. Malami’s proclamation of Operation Amotekun as illegal was “hypocritical” and “discriminatory”, seeing in North East Nigeria, Yobe and Borno States to be precise, there is a Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) of 26,000 well-armed volunteers who are assisting the Nigerian armed forces in their counterterrorism operations in the restive region. In Kano and Zamfara States respectively is the Hisbah Commission (an Islamic police force set up by the states governments), and in Lagos State the ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ which assists the Nigeria Police Force and other security agencies in securing human lives and valuable property. He therefore advised the incumbent governments of Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, and Oyo State to ignore Mr Malami’s purported proscription of the security outfit and proceed to enact the necessary laws establishing the Amotekun Corps (Adegunle et al., 2020; Ojo, 2020).

By giving such an advice to the six states governors to enact the laws setting up Amotekun, Dr Umar Jibrilu Gwandu is of the view that Mr Falana confirmed the Federal Government’s position that before the eyes of the law, the founding of the security outfit was unconstitutional. In his words:

“By asking for the state governments of the Southwestern Nigeria to ‘proceed to enact the necessary laws,’ in justifying the legality of the establishment and operation of Amotekon, Mr. Femi Falana is reaffirming and reiterating the Federal

Government's stance that the establishment of the operation currently is illegal.”
(Chioma, 2020)

On the part of Chief Gani Adams, he clearly pointed out that the AGF was not in the position to declare Amotekun as an illegal regional security initiative. According to him, “only a court of competent jurisdiction” can determine if the setting up of the Amotekun Corps is illegal or not, and not the learned AGF acting as the law court (Adegunle et al., 2020). Later in the month of January, 2020, Mr Abubakar Malami (SAN) came out to say that he was misconstrued *vis-à-vis* his released statement days back. Clearing the air, the AGF said he only called for Operation Amotekun to have the backing of the law to avert successive governments in the six states of South West Nigeria from rubbishing the Operation or declaring it illegal in the nearest future (Punch, 2020b).

On the 14th of February, 2020, Ekiti State House of Assembly passed the bill setting up the Amotekun Corps in the state (Vanguard, 2020). On the 3rd of March, 2020, Ondo State House of Assembly passed the State Security Network Agency and Amotekun Corps Bill. Similar bills establishing Amotekun were passed same day by the Lagos, Oyo, Ogun and Osun State House of Assembly (Adeyemi et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Obviously, Nigeria over the years has been confronted by a number of security challenges that cut across the multi-ethnic country or one of its regions. Much as this is true, they are surmountable, especially when there is unity and the political will to tackle these security challenges head-on. Thus far, the proposed regional security initiatives by the governments of sub-national units or groups in the Nigerian Federation are a proof that to a great extent, there is social cohesion and political synergy despite party differences. For the people of South West Nigeria, the child of necessity – Amotekun Corps is a ray of hope that the spate of armed robbery, kidnappings, ritual killings and the likes in the region will be reduced to the barest minimum if not become a thing of the past in coming years.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings in this paper, the following are strongly recommended to the state governments in South West Nigeria for consideration and implementation:

- i) Operation Amotekun and the law establishing the Corps in South West Nigeria was no doubt hastily put together owing to the unabating security challenges in the region. Thus, there is a need to painstakingly review in coming years the law setting up the Corps in order to correct any oversight;
- ii) Underfunding, coupled with corruption has been a major problem in the policing of Nigeria in general. The incumbent and successive governments in South West states should ensure adequate funds are made available to the Amotekun Corps, and accounted for by the Corps *vis-à-vis* its operations and the welfare of the officers;
- iii) The state governments in South West Nigeria should ensure the recruitment process of Amotekun Corps personnel is based on merit and not nepotism. Following their training and inauguration, they should from time to time undergo further training in order to keep up with new methods in tackling the security challenges bedevilling the region;
- iv) Traditional rulers of communities are indubitably closer to the people who take heed to their words. They should be consulted and carried along in the policing of communities;
- v) To fish out highway robbers, kidnappers and ritualists from their hideouts, there is the need for constant intelligence gathering from the locals, farmers, and hunters who are more familiar with these terrain and can quickly detect the hideouts of these highway criminals.

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