

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY POLICING FOR A SEAMLESS SECURITY THROUGH WEST NIGERIA SECURITY NETWORK (AMOTEKUN)

Amos Oyesoji AREMU, Ph.D

Email: oyesojiaremu@gmail.com

Department of Guidance and Counselling,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper discusses the recent evolution of traditional community policing model, West Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) codenamed, Amotekun. Amotekun policing model is a response to insecurity challenge in the Southwestern Nigeria, midwifed by the Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN). DAWN Commission is the initiative of the six Southwest states, Nigeria. The DAWN Commission, therefore, mooted the security initiative on the seeming ineffectiveness of the national police in response to internal security, especially, in Yoruba land. The region, in recent times, is 'plagued' with increasing insecurity like kidnapping and farm rustling, among others. This paper, interrogates in a twin-manner, the national police architecture response to security; and WNSN expected rise to the challenge of security issues within Southwestern Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommends some security measures and policies like the need for grassroots policing through which regional internal security could be assured, using Amotekun community policing model.

Keywords: Amotekun, DAWN Commission, Community policing, Internal security

Introduction

In the socio-political discourse in Nigeria in recent times, there is no subject matter that has attracted debates from all strata of the society as the establishment of West Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) being midwifed by Development Agenda for Western Nigeria (DAWN), a registered organization, put together by the Executive Governors in Southwest, Nigeria. The DAWN Commission is a dedicated technocrat organisation whose main objective is the development of the Southwest Region of Nigeria which is one of the six regions in Nigeria. The region is arguably the most sophisticated populated by Nigerian elites of

Yoruba extraction. Another first recorded by the Region, is the establishment of the first higher institution in Nigeria, Yaba Higher College, Lagos and the first television, Western Nigeria Television Service now known as Nigeria Television Authority in West Africa. Given the pedigree of the Southwest Region of Nigeria, which is in tandem with its developmental spree, the region through DAWN Commission championed the establishment of Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) that is popularly codenamed, Operation *Amotekun* (Leopard). *Amotekun* is the Yoruba name for leopard in English language. Leopard is a

strong carnivorous animal, which is very strong, deft, confident, rugged and intelligent. The philosophy of adoption of codenaming WNSN after leopard informed the motto of the outfit, which is zero tolerance for crime.

Prior to the launch of WNSN in Ibadan on January 09, 2020, the DAWN Commission had earlier held a stakeholder security summit at the International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan in June 2019. The Ibadan summit was motivated by the spate of insecurity in form of banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling which have not only engulfed the region negatively, but also, make it unsafe for lives and properties. Harping on the increasing spate of insecurity in Nigeria, according to Aremu (2015), the greatest contemporary challenge to national security in Nigeria is the terrorism orchestrated by the sect called Boko Haram. Aremu (2015) submits further that ‘‘prior to 2009, terrorism and its concomitant effects (both emotional and physical) were alien to Nigeria’’ (p.115). While the narrative of insecurity motivated by Boko Haram is traced to 2009, fallouts a few years after, has shown that more security threats have engulfed some parts of the country other than the North East that the Boko Haram fighters hold sway. These among others include and not limited to cattle rustling, banditry, kidnapping for huge ransom, and not politically motivated assassination.

Nigeria Security and Emerging Challenges

Nigeria in the last one decade has been grappling with serious internal security challenges, ranging from terrorism in the Northeast, insurgency in the Southsouth, kidnapping across the country, banditry, cattle rustling and assassination. While amplifying on the multifaceted insecurity in

Nigeria, Aremu and Stanislas (2019), note that two insecurity challenges (Boko Haram-motivated terrorism and Fulani farmers’ predatory violence) have not only brought Nigeria to the spotlight of insecurity globally, kidnapping and hostage taking are equally prolific simultaneously across the country. Stanislas and Iyah (2016) then note that the philosophy of kidnapping and hostage-taking is motivated by pecuniary gains mainly as a result of widespread unemployment and poverty in the country that have driven many forms of crime such as violence caused by religious extremism. Stanislas and Iyah (2016) had reasoned kidnapping and hostage taking is assuming more dangerous trends, especially, in the Southwest, Nigeria which prior to 2018 is considered relatively safe and secured. The emerging theory on kidnapping, especially in the Southwest, Nigeria indicates that the Fulani cattle herders are invading the region with a view to occupying the region orchestrate it. While this appears not too strong empirically, spate of high profile kidnapping and frequency of it, gives some nods to the theory.

One other insecurity scheme in Nigeria is the militancy in the South East and Niger Delta. Aremu and Stanislas (2019) are of the opinion that the philosophy of militancy in the Southsouth, is towards self-determination and control of oil installations in the region. While this and other insecurity challenges that confront Nigeria have brought hardships and morbid fear to the citizenry, the spate remains unabated given increasing statistics of insurgency and banditry in the North and kidnapping in the Southern part of the country. These emerging narratives of insecurity in Nigeria still make the country to rank as the third most impacted country on terrorism in 2019 in the world after Afghanistan and Iraq, a position the country

has held on to since 2015 Global Terrorism Index.

The spate of insecurity in Nigeria arising from the multifaceted narratives across the country has made the “country to be security-wearied and her people psychologically frayed particularly in the Northeastern and Southern parts of the country” (Aremu and Stanislas, 2019, p. 270). This has been raising, among stakeholders including international communities, some questions and concerns. In effect, the anatomy of insecurity in the last decade in Nigeria is not only overwhelming, it has also overstretched the country security architecture, including the Nigeria Police Force. The country’s security landscape is now populated with criminals in various forms and with sophisticated arms like Soviet-made assault rifle, Avtomat kalashnikova (AK 47), drones, dagger, arrows, etc., use for recoinnaissance operations like kidnapping, farm rustling, and assassination.

With these gory pictures of security challenges confronting Nigeria, there is a need to reappraise the security architecture. This not only calls for questions, but also, serious introspections. All over the world, the responsibility of internal security is exclusively that of police agencies. It is therefore, an aberration, for other security agencies other than the police to assume the responsibility of internal security. In an event of serious breakdown of law and order, other sister security agencies can only be invited to compliment the police. While not bringing the Nigeria Police under a public scrutiny, it is obvious, that the agency is confronted with challenges that are among other things, top down and operational. Aremu and Stanislas (2019), note that

Nigeria has a weak police both in very fundamental terms: numbers of personnel, resourcing, basic leadership and institutional ethos and intelligence capabilities.

Community Policing and National Police Responses

Community policing is a policing concept rooted in security paradigm shift in which police agency works with the community to ensure a seamless security operations. Purdy (2013) notes that community policing is a natural extension of the process of reform and modernisation for any police service agency. Purdy (2013) again notes that it is a policing philosophy in which partnerships is its cornerstone. Aremu and Emehinola (2006) report that the import of community policing is a paradigm shift, needed by the Nigerian Police to situate the agency in the contemporary policing approach and move away from the traditional method of policing. The inference from this submission is that as far back as about fourteen years ago when security challenges have not even rife, scholars have queried the policing method of the Nigeria Police. Thus, it is safe to aver that more than ever before, the traditional method of policing as put up by the Nigeria Police Force personnel can no longer hold sway, given current realities of insecurity in Nigeria. In other climes, police agencies have for long embrace the new approach, community-based policing. In consonance with this policing paradigm, Bayley and Shearing (1996), had advocated that community policing must become the organizing paradigm of public policing. At the risk of repeating a 1993 Survey of over 2000 United States Law Enforcement Agencies position on community policing in this paper, various police chiefs (from federal to local governments) unanimously

agreed that community policing would result in the following:

- Reduction of problems on issues of concern to citizens,
- Improved physical environment in neighbourhoods,
- Better public attitudes toward law-enforcement agencies,
- Decreased potential for conflict between citizens and police,
- Increased officer/deputy satisfaction; and
- Reduction of crime rates (National Institute of Justice, P.1, 1995).

The overriding inference from above reports is on seamless policing that is rooted in the community. That is, main mission of policing as championed by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 in his nine basic principles of policing. It should be stressed that Robert Peel is the proponent of modern policing. Peel's principle number seven states that:

To maintain at all a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties, which are incumbent on every citizen, in the interests of community welfare and existence.

Robert Peel's assertion deftly summarises the philosophy of community policing. Aremu (2014) notes that community policing, also known as neighbourhood policing, has gained momentum for a variety of reasons. It is a policing philosophy that recognises the need for members of the public partnering with police personnel in securing the society; and at the same time, making police personnel, not only to seamlessly secure the

society, but also, to ensure that it is done in a community police personnel understand and where they are welcomed and valued. The provision of community policing by tradition underscores the need to integrate policing into the community. Aremu (2014) amplifies this by asserting that "the philosophy hinges on the premise that traditional policing is not only monopolistic and not in tune with the security challenges in the 21st century, it has also become obsolete and not in tandem with original principles of policing as expounded by Robert Peel (p.30)". The dynamics of internal security job not only calls for immediate responsiveness, it is also to integrate policing in the community. Corder (1998) propounds three facets of community policing – philosophy of policing, strategy of policing and the tactics of policing. The philosophy of policing is on the community and police agency's synergy through which the neighbourhood is secured seamlessly. On the hand, the strategy is on operational tactics from the police personnel through which they deploy policing duties, while the tactics is on the implementation of the identified strategies. A cursory interrogation of Corner's (1998) facets of community policing, shows the saliency of community policing in which the hallmark is, integrating the locals into policing job. Other than the reasons mentioned above, Sluis, Cachet, Peter, Prins and Marks (2013) state that community-policing model was triggered primarily by concerns over the loss of police legitimacy. Obviously, this cannot be far from the truth.

In the light of this and inferences from same based on security challenges in Nigeria and seeming ineffectiveness of the Nigeria Police, it is safe to conclude that community policing would be the needed security

intervention. Aremu (2015) aptly amplifies this by submitting that in its present form, the Nigeria Police Force is ineffective to curtail insecurity in Nigeria. He alludes further that, “public trust in the agency has waned” (p.122). Not done with his postulations, Aremu (2015) notes further that the war against terrorism is not achieving the desired result because the approach is not intelligence and information based; rather, it is driven by emotions and political sentiment. More than these, current realities going by the pronouncement of the Federal Government, to have technically defeated Boko Haram can be said to be borne out of propaganda rather than operational effectiveness. While making a strong case for effective policing architecture, Aremu (2019), contends that contemporary policing has not only moved beyond reactive policing, it now addresses the need to be more proactive through intelligence sourcing, intelligence surveillance, crime mapping through digitalised mechanisms (close circuit television); and situational policing. This contention is borne out of the failure of unitary policing system in Nigeria. This, and gory profile of insecurity in Nigeria, inform strong agitations by federating regions to begin to look inward on how to secure the regions. Operation *Amotekun* in the Southwest, Rainbow in Plateau State, and Northern Nigeria Security Initiative refers to as *Shege Ka Fasa* (I dare you) by a Coalition of Northern Group, are a response to the challenges of insecurity in the land. It is also, instructive to aver that Nigeria with about 200 million people is grossly underpoliced with about 380,000 police personnel. This translates to about 1 police officer to about 600 Nigerians (a statistical ratio that falls below United Nations minimum of 1 police officer to 400 citizens). This scenario not only calls for

serious introspection; it also explains how seriously unsecured the citizenry is using minimum policing standard. This, perhaps, also informs the call for deregulation of the Nigeria Police as obtained in the colonial period and until 1968 post-independence Nigeria when Nigeria practised national, regional and native authority police systems. Some security yearnings that are well informed have led to agitation for dismemberment of the national police structure. One of the responses to this is the birth of Operation *Amotekun* in Southwest, Nigeria that is an unorthodox form of community policing. Unorthodox in the sense that, the country’s Constitution would have to be amended to accommodate subnational policing structure. With the reality of regional policing like Operation *Amotekun* in the Southwest, a security agenda which other regions of the country is emulating, the time is, more than ever before, to dismember the national police structure.

Emerging Security Architecture in *Amotekun* Model and Recommendations

In view of the failure of the national police to provide security and also, given the fact that the current police architecture is overstretched, security stakeholders have been canvassing for the establishment of state police which is not popular with the Federal Government of Nigeria. In other countries that practise federalism, the internal security is mainly at two levels (federal and state), while in others it is even at three levels (federal, state and local government). Countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Belgium, France, Algeria; and South Africa are good examples that adopt the model of subnational police architecture. Aremu (2019) is of the opinion that there is a

compelling justification for a multilevel approach to policing in Nigeria. This contention, not only stands valid, it calls for some security responses of which Western Nigeria Security Network that is codenamed Operation *Amotekun* is a response. The security model which operatives of *Amotekun* is expected to provide would not only be rooted in community policing, it will also be practically indigenised to peculiarities of the Yoruba-speaking people of Western Region in Nigeria. In effect, each of the six states (Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti and Lagos) will provide operational strategies for operatives of *Amotekun*. Thus, emerging security model should be rooted in policing philosophy of proactiveness, which is in tandem with the principles of community policing. Taking a clue from this, Lagos State Neighbourhood Safety Corps (NSC) model could be adopted by other states. The NSC's model, according to Aremu (2019) would bring security to the nook and cranny of the state. Aremu had earlier recommended replication of the model in other states.

In the above context, Operation *Amotekun* is fitting provided certain agenda are developed to drive the agency. Operatives of *Amotekun* as expected would be locals in their respective states and are expected to be well schooled in the tradition and culture of their communities. In this wise, it is expected that intelligence sourcing and sharing will be seamless and well coordinated. Our security ecosystem calls for this. Unfortunately, for long, the unitary policing system that is practised in Nigeria pretends to be practising community policing in which police personnel are alien to their operational beats. This perhaps, informs the recent review of the position of the federal government of Nigeria on the philosophy of community policing of the Nigeria Police Force.

Whatever is said to be community policing under the present national police architecture is merely theoretical and another way of foisting policing philosophy on the nation when the operational policing architecture and philosophy are antithetical to true community policing principle. Police personnel, where the philosophy of community policing is entrenched in the state police architecture, are not the sole guardians of laws and orders. Rather, members of the public naturally and freely support policing work and make same easy for the police personnel. It is instructive, therefore, that Operation *Amotekun* is not only fitting to community policing philosophy because its operatives would be drawn and reside within the community.

It is sufficed to also add that the second policing principle as enunciated by Sir Robert Peel, founder of modern police, states that, "The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of their functions". That approval is better given where the public also understands the security personnel. In effect, personnel of Operation *Amotekun* would require training and workshops on some fundamental principles of security, and mainly community policing. With that insight, it should be stressed that the regional police structure as represented by Operation *Amotekun* should scientifically and operationally key into the principles of community policing. The following five pillars would suffice in that regard:

- Intelligence Sourcing and Sharing,
- Building Trust and Legitimacy,
- Community Relationship (Interfacing with the public in a non-criminal way),
- Improved Support for the Police (Security personnel); and

- Understanding psychopathology of crime in the community.

Above five pillars should, therefore, be made to interface with the operations of Amotekun security personnel. It is only then that essence of creation of Operation Amotekun can be made to be real to the public.

Operation *Amotekun* should also be driven by probity and integrity in its structure if the outfit does not want to receive public opprobrium. This would require effective coordination of its activities, using bottom-up approach. The bottom-up approach rooted in integrity of personnel would enhance efficiency and public acceptance. Security is everybody's business. All hands should, therefore, be on deck to support the initiative that birthed Operation *Amotekun* in the Southwest, Nigeria. The Southwest has always been in the vanguard for progressive ideals. This is another opportunity to prove this dignity. One way through which the security outfit can make good this desire, is to insulate it from politics. Its concern and that of its operatives should be the security of lives and property and nothing else. The protagonists of state police have always advanced political interference as one of the landmines, which can consume subnational police structure. While this cannot be waved away, it becomes instructive to contend that the success of Western Nigeria Security Network (Operation *Amotekun*) rests on its insulation from politics among other factors. In addition, is the issue of funding which has always been a recurring decimal generally in the country. This, as a matter of policy should not be allowed to rub up on Operation *Amotekun*. It is then advocated that the six states in the Southwest, Nigeria should set up Western Nigeria Security Network Trust Fund (WNSNTF), which should be embedded in the legislation that will give legal backing to the agency. To

ensure value-added security, operatives of *Amotekun* should be intrinsically motivated.

The prime reason put forward to justify the establishment of Operation *Amotekun* is the provision of neighbourhood security. This in itself cannot be provided on a shaky foundation. Operatives of *Amotekun* should, therefore, be strengthened by providing police education and training. The policing philosophy of Operation *Amotekun* should not be primarily driven by orthodox approaches. Insecurity has not only become sophisticated, bandits and criminals are also daily deploying deadly weapons against their targets. It is sufficed to contend, therefore, operatives of *Amotekun* should be trained by seasoned security experts while at the sametime, not oblivious of orthodox approaches. A blended security model approach is, therefore, recommended. The blended security model should be seamlessly rooted in intelligence sourcing, gathering and sharing. These, would enhance operational tactics of *Amotekun*. Justifying this position, Arslan (2019) submits that educating police on analytics and the resultant findings might be the initial concrete sign of steps to build a stronger trust between the people and law enforcement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two fundamental narratives in this paper, insecurity and responses to it. While the first narrative has been extensively discussed in literature and its consequential prevalence and currency continues to receive national and international attentions, there seems not to be a consensus on the methodology of the second and responses. It is the second intervention that birthed the creation of regional security as championed by the Southwest Nigeria through Western Nigeria

Security Network (WNSN) known as Operation *Amotekun*. With this, the methodology of provision of proactive security could be achieved. Beyond this however, the country insecurity would be better tackled by having multilevel policing structures (federal, state and local). Thus, it is high time the country faced the reality of sub national police by deregulating the current unitary police.

References

- Aremu, A.O., & Stanislas, P. (2019). Police Strategies for Dealing with Tribal Conflicts in Nigeria. In J.F. Albrecht, G. Heyer & P. Stanislas (Eds.), *Policing and Minority Communities: Contemporary Issues and Global Perspectives* (Pp. 267 – 282). Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- Aremu, A.O. (2019). Urbanisation and Policing in Nigeria: Rethinking Security for National Stability. In I.O. Albert & T. Lawanson (Eds.) (Pp. 671 – 683). *Urban Crises and Management in Africa*. Austin Texas: Pan-African University Press.
- Aremu, A.O. (2015). Police Planning to Curb Insurgency in Nigeria: The Need for a Strong and Effective Police-Public Partnership. In J.F., Albrecht, M.C., Dow, D. Plecas & D.K. Das (Eds) (Pp. 115 – 124). *Policing Major Events: Perspectives Around the World*. USA: Taylor & Francis.
- Aremu, A.O. (2014). *Policing and Terrorism: Challenges and Issues in Intelligence*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers Ltd.
- Aremu, A.O., & Emehinola, S.A. (2006). *Correlates of Psycho-social Variables on Community Policing of the Nigeria Police*. Unpublished M.Ed. Thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Arslan, H. (2019). The Impact of Police Shootings in the United States on Police-Community Relations. In J.F. Albrecht, G. Heyer & P. Stanislas (Eds.), *Policing and Minority Communities: Contemporary Issues and Global Perspectives* (Pp. 105 - 124). Switzerland: Springer Nature.
- Cordner, G. (1998). *Community Policing: Elements and Effects*. In Alpert & Piquero (Eds.). *Community Policing: Contemporary Readings*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- National Institute of Justice. (1995). *Community Policing Strategies*. National Institute of Justice, Research Review, November, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Purdy, D.W. (2013). *Community Policing: Theoretical Problems and Operational Issues*. In A. Verma, D. Das & M. Abraham (Eds.), *Global Community Policing: Problems and Challenges* (Pp. 1 – 24).
- Sluis, A.V., Cachet, L., Peter, V.O., Prins, R., & Marks, P. (2013). *Community Policing in the Netherlands: A Continuously Changing Constant*. In A. Verma, D. Das & M. Abraham (Eds.), *Global Community Policing: Problems and Challenges* (Pp. 229 – 248).