

Regional Security Outfits and the Challenges of Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

The upsurge of violence in our body polity in the form of relentless attacks and killings by Boko haram especially in the northeast, armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom in the northwest, herdsmen militancy across the nation, armed robbery and other forms of violent crime across the country have left the regular Nigerian state security apparatuses overwhelmed and clearly unable to protect the citizenry from the multifarious threats posed by the spiralling violence. This has heightened the yearnings for restructuring of the polity and for the decentralization of the nation's security apparatus. Following the failure of the central government to accede to those yearnings, both state and non-state actors in the zones that make up the Nigerian federation have resorted to self-help security provisioning through the establishment of regional security networks. Prominent among these are the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) codenamed operation Amotekun, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and Ebube Agu, a security outfit proclaimed by the governments of the five states in the southeast zone. While some analysts have questioned the legality/constitutionality of such sub-national security outfits, others have insisted on their right to self and group protection. This paper transcends this debate and examines instead the implication of such security outfits for the rising security and the unity of the country, particularly going into the 2023 general elections. The study adopted the relational/vengeance theory as its framework of analysis. It relies on documentary method of data collection and qualitative analysis of data. It recommended that the government should discourage the proliferation of such security outfits while at the same time addressing the discontents that engender loss of confidence in the regular state security apparatuses.

Keyword: Operation Amotekun. Eastern Security Network (ESN); Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB); regional security outfits

Introduction

Nigeria is by far the most populous country in Africa. It is also richly endowed with natural and human resources and boasts the continent's putative largest economy. In recent years the country has been plagued by various forms of internal and even external security challenges. New forms of discord and distrust, have emerged in which the activities of religious extremists, armed militant and ethnic militia groups have unleashed the scale that is beyond anything previously witnessed simultaneously in all parts of the

country. The brunt of the civil war, for instance, was borne by the Igbos who were generally seen as the protagonists of the war.

Other indices of insecurity also include the persistent tension between the north and the south of Nigeria and between Christians and Muslims, festering unrest in the Niger Delta area and other parts of the country resulting in rise in violent incidents, especially kidnapping for ransom. Ethnic tension, religious differences, unemployment and numerous social and political grievances are all fuelling the unrests in Nigeria and contributing to flashpoints for violence and creating insecurity in the country (Udoh, 2015).

It is a well-known fact that the fundamental responsibility of the state is the security of the lives and property of its citizens. Others include the protection of its territoriality and sovereignty and the guarantee of its socio-economic and political stability. However, this protective function of the state is being eroded by the emergence of violent non-state actors who engage in violence and terrorism-related activities (Adams & Ogonnaya, 2014). In fact, Nigerians are beginning to lose faith in the ability of security agents to stop Boko Haram and other militant groups in the country. The feeling of insecurity has therefore become very pervasive among the populace.

Recently, there have been high incidences of insecurity that have resulted in deaths and psychological trauma for individuals and families in the country. The violent rise and resilience of the jihadist group Boko Haram in the North East since 2009 poses enormous security, humanitarian and governance challenges. Thousands of people have been killed in the terror group's attacks on schools, security forces, government agencies and churches. Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have been displaced. The group has also seized significant chunks of territory around their home state of Borno. With the increased numbers of cadres, improved and sophisticated weaponry, suicide bombings and well-organised guerrilla tactics, Boko Haram's challenge to the Nigerian state now also stretches across the entire 36 states of Nigeria, thus affecting its economic and social-political growth (Omilusi, 2016). Armed banditry, one of the scores of armed groups that have killed, raped, and plundered across the neglected northwest, forcing more than 200,000 people from their homes. Kidnapping is now an established criminal industry in Zamfara. Also, for much of this decade, a murderous conflict between herders and farmers have plagued Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2015, Fulani militants were adjudged the fourth deadliest terror group

in the world. In 2018, Fulani extremists were responsible for 1,158 fatalities in Nigeria—a majority of terror related deaths in Nigeria that year. Intense violence perpetrated by militant herdsmen has since expanded further towards the Southwest and Southeast regions, as herders search for grazing routes for their cattle. This has resulted in series of clashes with sedentary farmers in those zones occasioned by destruction of crops by the cattle. This is also accompanied by raping, killings and wanton destruction of lives and property.

The upsurge of violence in the country has left the centrally-controlled Nigerian state security apparatuses clearly overwhelmed and unable to protect the citizenry from the multifarious threats across the country. This has heightened the yearnings for restructuring of the polity and for the decentralization of the nation's security apparatuses. Following the failure of the central government to accede to those yearnings, the governments of the six states that make up the South West zone of the country launched a regional security network, the Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN) codenamed operation *Amotekun* on January 9, 2020.

While the governors of the South East zone were still prevaricating on the appropriate response to the security conundrum in the zone, a non-state actor and separatist group in the region, Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) took matters into their own hands by forming a militant wing called the Eastern Security Network (ESN).

In a rather reactive move, the governors of the five southeast states of Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo on 11th April, 2021 proclaimed the formation of a new security outfit in the zone codenamed *Ebube Agu*. The outfit, with its headquarters in Enugu, is charged with the responsibilities of coordinating the activities of community policing outfits in across the south east so as to checkmate the rising insecurity unrest in the region, including those posed by the activities of IPOB.

Two contending views are discernible in the literature on the unfolding regionalization of security provisioning in the country. While some analysts have questioned the legality/constitutionality of such sub-national security outfits, others have insisted on the right of the regions to self and group protection in the face of the failure of the central government to protect their citizens. This paper transcends this debate and examines instead the implication of the proliferation of such security outfits for the rising security challenges as well as the unity of the country, particularly going into the 2023 general elections. The rest of the paper is presented under following

subheadings: nature of regionalism in Nigeria; the challenge of policing in Nigeria; theoretical perspective; and conclusion.

Nature of Regionalism in Nigeria

There have been a lot of controversies on what 'Region' actually depicts. Agbola (2004) defines region as a flexible concept referring to a continuous and localised area intermediate between national and urban levels. To some, a region is a real entity that can be positively identified. To others a region is merely a product of imagination and method of classification.

The regionalism concept was introduced into the administrative framework of Nigeria shortly before Independence. It was entrenched through a series of constitutional developments and Amendments. The Constitutional development and Amendment were included in the 1946 Richards' Constitution, 1952 McPherson constitution and the 1954 Constitution. These laid the seed of ethnicity and tribalism. The beginning of the fragmentation and separatist tendencies and region economic disparities were bunched in Nigeria. The constitutional conference took place in London in 1945 and 1953 and in Nigeria in 1954. The federation of the three regions of Nigeria was recognised in these conferences. The Northern region has its headquarters in Kaduna, the Eastern region with headquarters in Enugu and the Western region with headquarters in Ibadan.

The origin of the idea that one region was different from the other could be traced implicitly from Lord Lugard's policy of Indirect rule or 'Divide and Rule' of the amalgamated Nigeria. According to Raheem Mayowa (2014) Lugard's policy of regionalising his administration under the Lieutenant Governors actually aggravated the increasing differences between the Northern and Southern region. The uneven administration and preparation of budgets for the two 'Nigerias' resulted in social and economic disparities being created between the two regions by the colonial administration, as well as the emergence of confrontational ethnicity.

Challenges of Policing and Security in Nigeria

It is important to begin the conversation by drawing a distinction between the Police as an institution and organisation, and policing as a function and role. Policing is about ensuring security and safety of persons and properties in a given area, including ensuring that rules, regulations and laws are obeyed [law enforcement], as well as

preventing, detecting, and investigating crimes, preparatory to prosecution. The police service on the other hand, is an institution and organisation established to carry out policing duties. The primary role of police is policing which entails securing compliance with existing laws and conformity with precepts of social order. But the police are not the only agency involved in policing, in the broad sense of the term. Policing has always been necessary in all societies for the preservation of order, safety and social relations. The necessity of policing becomes even more evident in modern societies characterized by diversities and contradictions arising from population heterogeneity, urbanization, industrialization, conflicting ideologies on appropriate socio-political and economic form of organization. However, the emergence of the police, a body of men recruited and paid by the state to enforce law and maintain order, is a recent development in human history (Reiner, 2000).

Traditionally, policing was the responsibility of all adults in community. In medieval society, all adult males were obliged to contribute towards the prevention and control of crime and disorder under the systems of 'hue, cry and pursuit' and the 'watch and ward that preceded the emergence of specialized police forces as organs of the state. But the emergence of the state, with its vast bureaucracies anchored on centralization, hierarchical authority/power structure, and professional staff (Weber 1968) changed the traditional policing philosophy rooted in the idea of policing as everybody's business. The emergence of the state as an entity with claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society (Weber 1968) resulted into the creation of specialized agencies such as the police and the armed forces for controlling the use of violence by other groups. According to Martin (1990, p.6) "Police work involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Officers are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, enforce the laws, maintain peace and public order, and provide a wide range of services to citizens". Broadly, modern police forces are assigned the primary duty of law enforcement and order maintenance. Reiner (1993) explained that the police are the specialist carriers of the state's bedrock power: the monopoly of legitimate use of force., but that how and for what this power is used speaks to the very heart of the condition of a political order. In other words, the police are organized to defend and preserve the interests of the dominant groups and classes in society. As such, the protection os the lives and properties of the citizenry may not always be the paramount preoccupation of

the police, particularly if such does not coincide with the prevailing interest of the dominant group in charge of the affairs of the state in a given period.

Also, the police, though universally acclaimed as the lead and main agency for internal security purposes is nevertheless not the only body entrusted with policing mandate. Other law enforcement agencies also carry out statutory policing duties and functions with respect to specific mandates and crimes. It is in this sense that it is important to distinguish between the structure of policing, for instance, a Federal, State, Local government or Community police; and the approach of community policing. Community policing is a strategic approach to policing that emphasises partnership between the police structure and the community it is policing. It is thus a strategic approach, and in the case of Nigeria it is now included in the Police Act 2020.

It is also important at this point to draw attention to the notion of ethnic policing as opposed to community policing. Ethnic policing is, like community policing, a strategic approach to policing that emphasises and revolves around policing in partnership with the ethnic community. In this instance, the community is now defined, not as the country, the state, the local government area, or the village, town or city; but as the ethnic group. It is important to underscore this point because, the manner of the emergence of the regional security outfits is such that they have emerged as and are evolving as ethnic security outfits, adopting the principle and strategic policing approach of ethnic policing. To be sure, regardless of the dominance or otherwise of this or that ethnic group within a region, here defined as the geo-political zones in Nigeria, or even of the relative ethnic homogeneity of any given region; a regional security outfit, oriented on the principle of ethnic policing, is not a regional policing organisation, nor will it be able to undertake effective, fair and just regional policing. The reason is that such an outfit based on ethnic identity, is in reality an ethnic security outfit, undertaking ethnic policing, and on the road to becoming an ethnic, rather than a regional police organisation. More so, there is no region in Nigeria without significant populations of Nigerians not originally from those regions, who are nevertheless domiciled and resident in these regions.

It will also be recalled that in recent times, security studies have undergone a paradigm shift as a result of which emphasis has shifted from issues of national security and state sovereignty to a more people focused idea of human security. By this, scholars have theorised that security of individuals within a state is a better way of guaranteeing the security of a state, or simply put, that the security of the state is coterminous with the

security of the citizens of the particular state. Concomitantly, security studies have also expanded from its traditional military origin to include non-military dimension such as environment, migration, ethno-religious and nationalist identities, poverty and human security and disease (Francis (2006, p. 23). Human security, therefore, entails a holistic measure that ensures the safety of individuals, including the environment inhabited by the people. In light of this, the point needs be made that despite abundant natural and human resources, human security in Nigeria has remained a highly problematic issue. It has, in fact, impeded the growth and development of the nation's economy through deteriorations in major channels such as tourism and investment in the country. Apart from government's lackadaisical attitude towards human security, many other factors combine to limit its achievement. Due to inefficient human security in the country, societies have adopted different measures to secure themselves (Uduabo 2019); such is the idea of community security.

Analysts have examined the problem of insecurity generally from various perspectives. Cameron and McCormic (1954) have pointed out nine different sources of insecurity, namely; insecurity as emotional response to sudden external threats from within; insecurity from a relatively constant threatening external situation; insecurity due to threat from within; and insecurity as a function of beliefs, especially religious; etc. These categories of insecurity are caused by "frustration and neurosis" (Cameron & McCormic 1954, p.559). This classification notwithstanding, it has been argued that Cameron and McCormic's work contains little of what can be regarded as empirical research on insecurity. Bar-Tal and Jacobson (1998) have also examined issues of security and insecurity. Using the security challenges in Israel as a case study, they specifically concerned themselves with approaches and methods of dealing with security situations. Thus, two main approaches to security studies were identified, namely, political and socio-psychological approaches. According to the political approach, security is an essential precondition of an ordered existence for an individual and societal system. Here, individuals and collectives must have a secured environment, which allows them to pursue their goals without being subjected to threats. The argument of this approach is that, it is the role of the state to provide security to its citizens, both on internal and external levels. On the domestic level, the state has to create economic, societal, cultural, environmental, and educational conditions, which assure life to its citizens. On the international level, the state has to defend the citizens against possible

harm from external forces (Buzan, 1991). Thus, this approach is concerned with military alliances, and foreign policy. Comprehensive as this approach may be, it neglects the economic, societal, cultural and psychological issues, which are imperative to the study of security. The socio-psychological approach on the other hand, argues that people as individuals and/or as group members (e.g., members of economic groups, nations) experience security, or insecurity, with regard to own personal life and/or with regard to their collective entity and its systems. Security thus, is a psychological experience. Generally, however, the paper did not explain, using both approaches to the study of security, what primarily causes insecurity in any given society (Ogbonnaya, 2013).

In another study, Ellen, Salemink and Eriksen (2010), examined security and insecurity from an anthropological perspective. Here, attempts were made to conceptualize insecurity from the perspective of social and human security. However, the major flaw of the paper is that it did not contextualize insecurity. In other words, the study did not locate insecurity within a given geographical environment or location. With particular reference to Nigeria, Ezeribe (2009) has catalogued a history of conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria since independence in 1960. Here, the conflicts, which result in insecurity are traced to the colonialists creating antagonistic ruling class along ethnic and religious lines. Thus, the northern part of Nigeria has had a long history of security challenges, communal and ethno-religious crises. For example, in Plateau State, there have been many outbreaks of bloody violence between different communities since the return to democracy in 1999. There have also been riots in urban centers of Kaduna and Kano, and for several decades there has been simmering conflict in the Tafewa Balewa district of Bauchi (Walker, 2012). According to Walker (2012) and Azizi (2012), when viewed from outside, it does seem that these conflicts boil down to religious differences, tensions between blocs of Muslim and Christian inhabitants. But on a closer consideration, one finds that politics - more precisely, control of government patronage - is the primary cause of many of these conflicts. However, the Boko Haram insurgency which surfaced in 2009 with bombing attacks and killings which as at last count, have left over 16,000 Policemen, soldiers and civilians including politicians dead (UNCIRF, 2012) remains one of the recent trends in regionally-based related-violence dimensions to security challenges facing Nigeria. Other security analysts have contended that the current security challenges confronting the Nigerian state is capable of making the country porous for internal and external subversion and insurrection. Thus, they have

called for more stringent security measures and policies rather than being saddled with peace-keeping operations in other countries while lacking the ability to deal with internal security crisis, conflicts and tensions. Finally, these analysts have submitted that current national defense budget and policy should be properly channelled towards economic, social and political development (Agbambu, 2011; Azazi, 2012).

Theoretical Perspective

We adopted some propositions of the relational/vengeance theory for this work. Relational theory attempts to provide explanation for violent conflicts between groups by exploring sociological, political, economic, religious and historical relationships between such groups. The belief is that cultural and value differences as well as group interest all influence relationships between individuals and groups in different ways. Thus, a number of conflicts grow out of a past history of conflict between groups that has led to the development of negative stereotypes, racial intolerance and discrimination (Faleti, 2006). The differences in value invariably create the 'We' and 'Others' dichotomy. The fact that "Others" are perceived as different makes us feel they are entitled to less or are inferior by reason of value (Best,2006).

Meanwhile, there has been regional imbalance in Nigeria since the colonial period and this has created the economic and political dichotomy between the different regions. Historically, the Nigerian case has been a war of one region against others. The military coup of January 1966 was seen by many northerners as an attempt by the Igbo people of the east to dominate the federation. This perception led to a successful counter coup six months later which was led by northern soldiers. Given that the north was less developed, they feared that by taking over the reins of governance, the southerners were taking over control of everything. This was in addition to the loss of their political leaders and some of their finest officers during the January, 1966 coup. Cumulatively, these triggered the July 1966 counter-coup led by army officers of northern extraction. In addition to the elimination of many Igbo officers during the July 1966 coup, a massive pogrom against Igbos occurred in the Northern region. All these culminated in the 30-month Nigerian civil war also known as the Biafran war.

Another case is the reaction of the Western region after the annulled June 12,1993 election. Arising from the annulment, the Western region formed the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), which was a militant ethno-nationalist group with the objective of

fighting for the restoration of a mandate they claimed was won by their kinsman, Chief M.K.O. Abiola. The Yoruba were afraid that the North wanted to monopolize the political leadership of the country and so formed the OPC as a militant resistance as a tool for political revenge and retaliation against any such scheme.

The Sharia war was another case, which made majority of Christian Nigeria to flee the Muslim dominated Northern region for fear of their lives. Thus, the case of Nigeria has been that of one region living in fear of another and making retaliatory or revengeful move against the other(s) at the slightest provocation. This can also explain why majority of these regional security outfit were formed having other regions in mind. And this raises a concern about the centrifugal tendencies of the proliferation of regional security outfits in Nigeria.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

This work set out to examine the security and national cohesion implications of the recent proliferation of regional security networks in Nigeria. It found that the officers of these regional security outfits are not properly trained leading to their improper conduct, particularly with respect to human rights violations. Between December 2020 and January 2021, for instance, at least 11 civilians were reported to have been killed by *Amotekun* operatives. The Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka told reporters that the group needed ethics training. The paper also found that the proliferation of regional security outfits in the country cannot be entirely divorced from the build-up to the all-important 2023 general elections. The Eastern Security Network (ESN) has also been accused of various human rights and states security breaches including the killing of innocent citizens, law enforcement agents and destruction of private and public property, particularly the burning of police stations. In fact, it has been alleged that at least 127 police and security forces have been killed and some 20 police stations and election commission offices have been stormed between January and July 2021 following the group's activities. IPOB, however, denies any accusations of violence. The group's imposition of sit-at-home orders on the entire southeast zone every Monday, since July 26, 2021 when the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was scheduled to be arraigned before Justice Binta Nyako of the Abuja Division of the Federal High Court has since become a major drain on the economy of the southeast thereby infringing on the right of the people to earn a decent living. It could therefore rightly be said that the

proliferation of regional security networks poses security threat and existential challenges to the Nigerian nation and the citizenry.

In light of this, we recommend that the federal government should discourage the proliferation of regional security outfits by addressing the underlying causes of the resort to self-help by both state and non-state entities at the sub-national level. The federal government should also seriously consider acceding to requests for the decentralization of the formal police force through the establishment of state and community police as is the practice in advanced federal states like the United States of America.

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