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Abstract

Index terms—

The Western Nigeria Security Network and the Fight against Hostage-Taking and Kidnapping in the South-Western Region of Nigeria

1 I. INTRODUCTION

The collapse of state power, particularly in the realm of law enforcement and security, has been at the center of scholarly and ideological discussions concerning the future of Africa's politics and governance ever since the Cold War ended (Nolte, 2007). Certainly, the hand of time has long been speeded up in terms of various security concerns in Nigeria. Lately, insurgency, armed robbery, cattle rustling, herdsman-farmer clash, piracy, rape, human trafficking, domestic violence, and kidnapping are just a few of the issues facing governance. These issues have, understandably, threatened the country's corporate existence spanning over six decades; there has also been the general issue of the country failing to have the type of robust security framework/architecture required to boost the internal and national security. Intrinsicly, as part of the contractual allegiance it owes her citizens, as exclusively outlined in Chapter 2, Section 14, (2a) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, 'the fundamental aim of Federal and State governments will be the security and welfare of the people', and the government is seen rising to the challenge of adopting a series of tougher security measures and strategies to curtail security threats.

Consequently, it has sparked continued debates about the efficacy of the strategies adopted to combat security challenges headlong. However, formal state institutions are mostly debated when it comes to the provision of public goods, particularly security (Agbibo, 2019). Among such queries was raised by Agwanwo (2014) concerning Nigeria is experiencing very serious security and crime issues, which appear to be dampening the institutional capacity of the criminal justice system, calling into question the role and ability of the police to protect citizens' lives and property. Congruently, the majority opined that the police alone can no longer exterminate the innumerable security threats directed at the nation.

Correspondingly, Ekiti state Governor, Dr. John Kayode Fayemi while featuring on the July edition of the monthly programme tagged 'Meet Your Governor' aired by all media outfits in the state, argues that the structural operation of the federal police is grossly inadequate to secure the entire nation (Independent Newspaper, 2019). Similarly, this view is affirmed by Badejo (2020) who states that "Nigeria is politically charged and lacks safety and security, which is an understatement. Terrorists are competing to see who can kill more people than the other. Many nationalities' drums of separation have recently become louder." Kidnapping, which was once limited to the Niger Delta, has now made travelling throughout the country extremely dangerous. However, in comparison to the rest of the country, the southwestern region had previously been relatively peaceful. Surprisingly, the region which was once known for its limpid ambience has recently witnessed weird and outlandish kidnapping operations.

Informed by the aforementioned issue, the six southwestern governors of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States converged in January 2020 to launch a regional security outfit, Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), in an effort to rid the southwestern region of all forms of criminality as well as provide a long-term alternative to the country's weak security architecture. Indeed, it is not arbitrary to argue that the fact that the southwestern region is home to millions of people, predominantly the Yoruba, with shared ancestry, beliefs, values, and culture contributed to the initiative's speedy endorsement and establishment. The obvious affinities amongst these governors and the governed stimulated the timely and cooperative responses needed to obliterate the vehicles of insecurities in the region, in addition to the shared historical antecedents and geopolitical factors.

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48 Likewise, the integrative synergy of the region becomes apropos because of its obligatory stance to enhance
49 economic growth and development; hence the necessity to adopt a well-articulated strategy that will enable the
50 establishment of a solid socioeconomic foundation for the region and future generations (Nwoko & Osiki, 2016).
51 Consequently, the major stakeholders in this region have joined forces to promote and ensure the security of
52 investments and other economic activities, resulting in the WNSN initiative (Nwoko, 2021). Pertinently, the
53 WNSN scheme is viewed as a response to recurring security challenges which not only tops the list but has
54 become a recurrence episode in the region.

55 Basically, by virtue of the geographic area of southwest Nigeria, virtually all the communities have been
56 compelled to comply with the demands of the marauding kidnapers, and consequently, the region has since
57 become a haven for kidnapers. Subsequently, all manners of kidnapping operations have been successfully
58 carried out. Previously, wealthy members of the society were the targets of kidnap gangs, but this has quickly
59 evolved as everyone has become their target, not even the farmers working on their farmland, traditional rulers
60 in their palaces, and petty traders in their shops are spared. Everyone has become easy targets for kidnapers in
61 the region. As a matter of fact, the issue of kidnap has become a very worrisome occurrence, particularly because
62 the region was once regarded as the most peaceful in the country as a whole, as it no longer enjoys the peace
63 for which it was known. As a result, everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, is now so fearful that they are
64 unable to go about their normal lives for fear of becoming the next victim of this antisocial trend of 'kidnapping.'
65 London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences Following this, it is not farfetched to suggest that
66 the residents of these states who are subjected to incessant kidnap and hostage-taking are frequently terrified and
67 frightened. As such, kidnapping is viewed as one way in which states and their residents are challenged. These
68 challenges are evidential proof of loss of state authority, which eventually results in economic loss, human rights
69 violations because the freedom and security of the citizens are not guaranteed, and instability, which frequently
70 results in regional and national regrets. States confronted with ceaseless kidnap, which eventually eventuate in
71 the breakdown of state power face enormous human security challenges that cannot be gainsaid. To this end,
72 it behoves these states to obligatorily develop strategies to combat kidnapping in order to ensure protection. In
73 contrast, Bamidele (2017:86) argues that 'the irony of security sector governance and the fight against criminality
74 in Nigeria is that non-state security groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), also known as Yan
75 Gora, are frequently overlooked.'

76 The Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), is a regional
77 security outfit with divisions in all six states of the southwest region. WNSN or Amotekun is a group of young
78 people who want to help the police and other security agencies combat kidnapping and other crimes in the
79 region. However, as a mechanism for combating kidnapping syndicates in the region, the WNSN has elicited
80 mixed feelings and reactions. Vast studies on non-state security organizations and informal security outfits have
81 tended to emphasize the detrimental effects, such as the commission of human rights crimes, and penchant
82 for extra-judicial killings rather than the crucial roles these groups play in a community's safety and security
83 (Ogbozor, 2016 In accordance with the aforementioned, this paper contends that the emergence of WNSN as
84 part of the mechanisms for fighting kidnapping, hostage-taking and other security threats represents a veritable
85 example of a regional response to security challenges, as well as an indication of how kidnapping can be dealt
86 with through regional efforts and knowledge. It also demonstrates or attests to the reality that offering security
87 has never been a state monopoly, but rather a hyphenated field of delivery (Hills, 2009). Correspondingly, the
88 WNSN has been effective in frustrating the activities of kidnapers by laying a marker and dislodging their
89 hideouts in the forests, as well as rescuing a number of victims in their dens, due to its deep knowledge of
90 the local environment and its involvement in the socio-cultural life of the locality. Since the kidnapping in 2006,
91 information about regional security in the southwest has been scarce. In many cases, the government also restricts
92 information about ??NSN

93 2 II. REGIONAL SECURITY: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

94 The dialogue on regional security initiative is rooted in the heart of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)
95 initiated by Barry Buzan and afterward, advanced by Ole Waever. The duo's idea has since been regarded as
96 part of the Copenhagen School's collective theoretical approach to security. Regional security conceives London
97 Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences securitisation as a more effective countermeasure against
98 terrorism and less difficult to achieve, as well as indirectly implying a broad-spectrum security. Its emergence,
99 centered on numerous security threats and how to counter them, indisputably gave birth to the concept of regional
100 security as a paradigm shift to address challenges confronting every society, particularly at the basic level. In
101 essence, the goal is to develop functional security architecture at the regional level in order to achieve seamless
102 and effective security across the various strata of society. Given their proximity, states have perceived their
103 immediate neighbours as potential sources of threat or protection. ??uzan & Waever (2003:229) contend that the
104 relational nature of security makes it impossible to understand the national security patterns of a state without
105 a compact understanding of the pattern of regional security interdependence in which they exist.

106 Regional security initiatives proponents believe that there should be a focus on the shared pattern of
107 security concerns and interconnection that binds the states together, for it is the primary security concerns
108 that knit them together so closely that their national security cannot pragmatically be considered apart from
109 one another ??Buzan, 1991:190). Likewise, Hettne (2000) argues for the importance of dealing with the region's

110 social structures because it is crucially germane for a region to have its own identity, however nascent, as an
111 interdependent state that is distinct and promotes security within a national construct.

112 Intrinsically, regional security mode or security management effectively makes it possible to get things done
113 regionally because it is a viable channel. Since it involves states within geographical proximity of one another,
114 and as a holistic unit, the security management enables the states to collectively solve their shared security
115 challenges through long-term, resilient, and sustainable solutions. As such, rather than at the national level, the
116 region effectuated an all-round success in achieving security arrangements during the post-second World War for
117 instance. The aptness of these security perceptions is underscored by the growing realization that no government
118 or authority has the resources to adequately solve all public challenges/problems, and in the case of security,
119 regional people, as stakeholders in their regions, not only understand their neighbourhoods better, but also
120 share the common goal of promoting and protecting them. The understanding at the outset of the fight against
121 kidnapping, and hostage-taking is that, while kidnapping and its variants are the work of marginal syndicates,
122 these people are nonetheless integrated within the region and are not, on the whole, interlopers working alone.
123 As a result, regional security forces, if involved in the fight against kidnapping, could be well-built to serve as
124 an early warning mechanism/system for police and intelligence agencies if they come across information or have
125 concerns about specific individuals or groups (Birt, 2009).

126 Regional security, inconsequential of the headlines and how it is emphasised, exemplifies a people-centered
127 approach. Irrefutably, security is both desirable and necessary for everyone's survival. This is also true for
128 community security, which represents the collective desire for safety and protection. Per se, regional security can
129 be viewed as a tool for states to protect themselves collectively against a variety of security threats, including
130 kidnapping. However, despite the fact that the WNSN has been heavily promoted as a tenable means for achieving
131 safety against kidnapping in the southwest region, it appears that it has been grossly underutilized to achieve
132 the desired results of fighting headlong and possibly nipping off kidnapping in the region.

133 Consequently, the meteoric rise in kidnapping cases in the southwest region has left regular Nigerian state
134 security apparatuses overwhelmed and unable to protect the citizenry from the incessant threats posed to the
135 region by the perpetrators of the gruesome cruelty, making it critical to investigate alternative and complementary
136 approaches to enhancing security. Therefore, this paper examines the WNSN in order to contribute to the
137 dialogue on a regional security approach to fight against kidnapping in Nigeria. In particular, this work intends
138 to understand the resort to self-help by the states in the region, as exemplified by WNSN. In the London Journal
139 of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences furtherance of these intentions, this research aims to advance
140 the significant reasons state security agencies should partner with WNSN in their efforts to curtail kidnapping.
141 Regional security or regional security partnerships/cooperative security systems at the regional level extend
142 beyond international politics and into the security sphere. The practice of security cooperation has increased the
143 importance of regional composite security frameworks in combating rising contemporary security challenges. It
144 is assumed that security practices evolve. Proportionately, new security measures are invented, built upon, and
145 gradually added to existing structures to make them more resilient to evolving threats.

146 To clarify the meaning of region amid so many debates, Agboola (2004) defines region as a flexible concept
147 referring to a continuous and localized area intermediate between national and urban levels. In a not-too-dissimilar
148 assertion, Saferworld (2014: 5) defines security partnership as:

149 A people-centered approach to addressing insecurity that integrates human security, development, and state-
150 building paradigms, it works by bringing together a diverse range of state and civil society actors from both the
151 demand and supply sides of security to collectively identify root causes of insecurity and develop coordinated
152 responses to them. The approach is based on communities', local governments', and security providers' ability
153 and willingness to address their sources of insecurity. It fosters a favourable environment for broader reforms and
154 more people-centered policies at the sub-national and national levels.

155 However, swift significance and a major bottom line for regional security have been given appendage due to
156 the incessant occurrence of crimes that have incapacitated both military and paramilitary agencies against their
157 backs. Odewale & Lamidi (2020: 104) succinctly underscore the regional security partnership imperativeness by
158 spotting the fact that:

159 The recurring decimal of social crimes, such as banditry and kidnapping, among other violent acts, has
160 necessitated the reinvigoration of informal approaches to the security of lives and properties in recent times.
161 Initially, group formations were visible as an unofficial response to criminal threats such as burglary, pot theft,
162 and home-breaking cases. The severity of these crimes also influenced the concept of street policing, which has
163 received little discussion but is evidence-based. Furthermore, its recurrence in various dimensions and forms
164 sparked the current debate on community policing across Nigerian states, with some rapid formation, such as
165 Hisbah police among joint task forces in the country. The police-community relations committee, in particular, is a
166 permanent unit for interactions and operations involving communal security issues. Pertinently, regional security
167 partnerships distinguish between the system-level interaction of national powers, whose capabilities allow them to
168 transcend distance, and the subsystem-level interaction of lesser powers, whose primary security environment is
169 in their local region. The fact that most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long distances,
170 security interdependence is typically patterned into regionally based clusters. As a result, regional security is an
171 obvious matrix of a realistic and useful initiative for enhancing strong regional security, which, of course, speaks
172 volumes and has implications for achieving national security. To accomplish this, regional security requires not

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173 only cooperation but also commitment in terms of pooling resources among states within the said constituent
174 to sustain and keep the outfit afloat. More often than not, it also necessitates collaboration with traditional
175 state security agencies, most importantly to achieve a holistic securitization based on long-term partnership and
176 collaboration.

177 In contrast, the inclusion of the WNSN as a regional security network in Nigeria's southwest has yet to fully
178 embody the type that properly demonstrates bringing on board all of the local community needed to make it
179 an all-inclusive London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences initiative. Although it is widely
180 acknowledged that regional security is primarily driven by state cooperation, the local people who inhabit its
181 heart have more important roles to play in ensuring its success. Refusal to enlighten them of their expected
182 responsibilities could be detrimental because it has been documented that locals in some communities have
183 conspired with syndicates to kidnap members of their communities rather than work with the WNSN. Given
184 this, it becomes germanely apropos that local people must be sensitized against collaborating with criminal
185 elements undertaking kidnapping in their vicinity and as well made them aware of the importance of regional
186 security networks in ensuring local people's safety in their various communities. By doing so, they recognize that
187 the benefit far outweighs the shortcoming in such an initiative, and in return, the outfit receives not only the nod
188 but also robust cooperation in making their task of preventing kidnapping an easy one. It is thus conceived that,
189 in order for the regional security network's efforts to stamp out kidnapping in southwest Nigeria, people in the
190 various hinterlands must be given good education and convincing reasons to embrace the initiative as belonging
191 to them, as opposed to the usual mindset they have long nursed against conventional security agencies, summed
192 up in 'cat and dog' coexistence.

193 Regional security networks in southwest Nigeria are widely misunderstood as having nothing to do with
194 the hinterland communities and instead with the urban cities that serve as state capitals. However, on closer
195 inspection, kidnapping, and hostage-taking are no longer confined to cities; rather, they have spread to the region's
196 hinterlands and forested communities. As a result, residents must be made aware that a security network has
197 been established to protect them from kidnappers and hostage-takers in such communities. Another bottleneck
198 in the regional security network is citizens' failure and reluctance to provide vital information required to respond
199 aggressively to criminals in their community. This has been found to significantly impede the WNSN's efforts to
200 rid the region of kidnappers.

201 Although some of these bottlenecks may be attributed to a lack of an effective communication strategy and
202 initiative on the part of the Corps and members of the public in the fight against the known and common
203 community nuisance, 'kidnapping.'

204 While it is critical for the WNSN to reach out to the people for information and appropriate intelligence about
205 their surroundings, the government must equally be ready to provide the outfit with the necessary arms and
206 operational tools to work with, as fighting kidnappers necessitates being overly well equipped and battle-ready
207 (armed to the teeth)

208 3 III. THE EVOLUTION, COMPOSITION AND ADMIN- 209 ISTRATION OF WESTERN NIGERIA SECURITY NET- 210 WORK

211 The call for the establishment of the WNSN was first mentioned at the regional security summit held in Ibadan,
212 Oyo State, Nigeria in June 2019 and attended by all six state governors, dubbed the Development Agenda for
213 Western Nigeria (DAWN). As a result, the security outfit, also known as Amotekun, which means leopard in
214 Yoruba, is an operational nomenclature for the WNSN. The leopard represents strength, perseverance, ambition,
215 independence, toughness, patience, wisdom, and fearlessness. The Amotekun is also known for its distinct
216 hunting behavior and well-camouflaged appearance, which enable it to defend its territories from intruders. In
217 either case, the animal exudes confidence, strength, and the ability to chase and catch up with prey at lightning
218 speed (Oladele & Adeniran, 2020; Adetunmbi & Adedigba, 2021; Nwoko, 2021).

219 On January 9, 2020, all the six south-west governors of Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos States
220 unilaterally agreed to the formation of the corps as the first regional security outfit initiated by the South-West
221 geopolitical zone in Nigeria. On the other hand, everyone's mind wanders with the question, why is WNSN in
222 the southwest region? What could have prompted the agitation and subsequent establishment of WNSN? Could
223 it have been precipitated by the shenanigans of the region's gladiators? Without reducing the three questions to
224 probabilities or conjectures, it should be stated that the idea of forming a regional security outfit was motivated
225 by the prevalent pervasive issues and a number of insecurity problems such as herder-farmer clashes, banditry,
226 cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and hostage-taking that plagued the region on a regular basis, giving the
227 region the appearance of a battlefield.

228 In attestation of the bleak security situation that pervades the southwest region and, by extension, Nigeria
229 as a whole, the concept of WNSN regional security outfit arose as a result of the central government's failure to
230 protect its citizens, and because the region has lost faith in the country's security agencies. Subsequently, they no
231 longer feel secure, necessitating the need for them to seek an alternative. For instance, Nwoko (2021:1) observes
232 that the Amotekun initiative arose as a result of the region and the country's deteriorating security situation,
233 which the Nigerian government has demonstrated a lack of capacity to address. In a similar vein, Iwuamadi et al.

234 (??021) argues that the increase in violence in the country has left the centrally-controlled Nigerian state security
235 apparatuses clearly overwhelmed and unable to protect the citizenry from the country’s diverse threats. This has
236 increased the desire for polity restructuring and decentralization of the nation’s security apparatuses. Following
237 the failure of the central government to meet those desires, the governments of the six states that comprise the
238 country’s South West zone established a regional security network, the WNSN, codenamed Operation Amotekun.

239 The WNSN security outfit was designed to accommodate both state and non-state actors, including local
240 hunters, the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC), Agbekoya, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC),
241 vigilante groups, security experts, and other Yoruba socio-cultural groups involved in local security. Not only
242 that, but the group was supposed to work under the supervision of the Nigerian Police Force. According to the
243 country’s Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) will be involved in the
244 recruitment, training, and deployment of personnel assigned to Amotekun operations (Izuora, 2020). The plan was
245 to create a framework that would provide the logistics and support needed for effective community policing in the
246 southwest region. Thus, the WNSN was formed to supplement the activities of traditional policing organizations
247 such as the NPF, NSCDC, SSS and other state security institutions (Olawale, 2020). WNSN security outfit has
248 units in each of the six states of the region. The activities within its jurisdiction London Journal of Research
249 in Humanities and Social Sciences will be coordinated by the local government organ. Each local government
250 will have a relationship with the state command. The six-state commands will report to the regional command
251 and operate from the control center in Ibadan, Oyo State and work closely with the Developmental Agenda for
252 Western Nigeria (DAWN) Commission, which oversees the initiative administratively. The WNSN setup appears
253 to stoutly rely on Dane guns for its weapons and ammunition, which are similar to those used by hunters when
254 hunting animals in the forest.

255 For coordinated operations and administrative robustness, the security outfit has its regional headquarters
256 located in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. However, in each of the six states’ capitals, a correspondent office is
257 located and coordinated by the commandant, with its activities regulated by the commissioner of Police in each
258 of the states. To cater for the financial commitment of the outfit, a security trust fund was established to foot the
259 bill. Each state is also obliged to recruit the number of personnel they are capable of maintaining. The initiative
260 not only serves as an intelligent arm for conventional security; it also assists security forces in conducting more
261 intensive and extensive routine patrols throughout the region. As a result, they serve as CCTV in most rural
262 areas, gathering information about crimes and suspicious activities for interpretation and appropriate action.

263 Furthermore, security has featured prominently in today’s framework, with continents, sub continents, regions,
264 states, and local communities all competing intrinsically and extrinsically to improve their immediate domestic
265 security posture. Stability is inevitably a major policy challenge for policymakers as well as communities and
266 groups all over the world. This is because the framework remains a complex phenomenon that, without a doubt,
267 necessitates not only defense initiative but also concrete precautionary and resilient decisions to be managed
268 in order to avoid the loss of lives and property. As a result, security demands not only physical protection
269 from existing harm, but also the development of resilient socio-political and economic structures to deal with its
270 complexities. Accordingly, as a necessary consequence, the WNSN was established in Nigeria’s southwest region.

271 4 IV. REGIONAL SECURITY: WNSN AND ANTI- 272 KIDNAPPING IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

273 Thus far, the fight against kidnapping led by the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and other allied forces in Nigeria’s
274 southwest region has been ultra-conservative and has failed to meet the expectation of curbing the growing
275 threat of kidnapping in the region. This is evident by the security agencies’ almost non-existent dislodgement
276 of kidnapers and rescue operations of victims, which are, of course, nowhere near or comparable to the torrent
277 of daily successful kidnapping operations carried out by mafias and criminal gangs in the region. In fact, hardly
278 a day passes without hearing or reading unbelievable news or events such as kidnapping, hostage-taking, and
279 abduction of citizens riveting the southwest region. In a survey conducted in 2013 by the CLEEN Foundation
280 in collaboration with the United States-based Macarthur Foundation to ascertain the region with the highest
281 number of kidnappings in the country, the southwest region has the highest number of kidnappings, with 5% of
282 respondents from the region who participated in the survey alleging they have either been kidnapped or attempts
283 have been made to kidnap them (Premium Times, 2013).

284 In the past, the apparent lack of regional security in the fight against kidnapping in the region grew the success
285 rate of kidnapping. It significantly increased the region’s high number of cornucopia kidnapping occurrences,
286 more than twice as many as what obtains in other regions that make up the country. In reaction to this common
287 knowledge, the Nigerian Police Force’s operations demonstrated a lack of involvement of a regional security in the
288 fight against kidnapping in the region. For instance, during a visit to Ondo State Governor Rotimi Akeredolu in
289 Akure, the erstwhile Deputy Inspector General of Police in Charge of Operations, Abdulmajid Ali, briefed him
290 that: London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences Plan was in full swing, with squad members
291 currently undergoing training in Abuja before being dispatched to Ondo State and other southwest states to
292 combat kidnapping. The Inspector General of Police has dispatched me not only to Ondo State, but also to
293 other southwest states, to inspect the security architecture on the ground and to advise on how to redesign the
294 security apparatus. I decided to start with Ondo before moving on to Ekiti and Osun because, with Ondo being

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295 one of the focal points of recent events, I believe we need to sit down with my officers here and discuss how we
296 can work together in the future. I want you to know that the Inspector General of Police is conscious of what
297 has been going on, particularly along the road, how some of these miscreants are disturbing the peace (Vanguard
298 Newspaper, 2019).

299 Nonetheless, kidnappings are on the rise in the region, necessitating the pursuit of alternative approaches,
300 including regional security policies. Local hunters, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Agbekoya, the Nigeria
301 Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), vigilante groups, security experts, and other Yoruba socio-cultural
302 groups involved in local security comprise the WNSN in the Southwest region (Vanguard Newspaper, 2019). The
303 WNSN security outfit has a correspondence office in each of the six southwestern states: Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun,
304 Ondo, Osun, and Oyo, each with its own commander in charge of members in the hinterlands, towns, and villages
305 under his command. According to Adetunmbi & Adedigba (2021): Amotekun security outfit is a local affair.
306 Squads of Operation Amotekun are stationed at 52 backstops spread across the south-west geopolitical region.
307 Each state has its own unit of measurement. The activities within its jurisdiction will be coordinated by the local
308 government organ. Each local government will interact with the state command. The six-state commands will
309 report to the regional command and operate from the control center in Ibadan, Oyo State, and the operational
310 base in Gbongan, Osun State. They will also collaborate closely with the Developmental Agenda for Western
311 Nigeria (DAWN) Commission, which will provide administrative oversight for the initiative.

312 The Amotekun security unit resembles the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast counter-
313 insurgency campaign. The southwest Amotekun is to effectively collaborate with all countermeasure's mercenaries
314 in the region, assisting the NPF and other forces in curbing kidnapping in the region. Professor Banji Akintoye,
315 for instance, gave insight into the type of partnership and collaboration that would exist between Amotekun
316 personnel and conventional police, noting that they would be specifically trained on the standard operating
317 procedure. According to him, some people are wondering how the police will interact with Amotekun; his response
318 was: 'Don't forget that we are being led by highly educated people who will properly shape their relationship so
319 that Amotekun and the Police can work together without conflict. There will be no disagreements' (Yahaya &
320 Bello, 2020:166). However, it is clear from Akintoye's submission that collaboration between state and non-state
321 actors is required to combat kidnapping in the region. Ondo State Governor Rotimi Akeredolu, a Senior Advocate
322 of Nigeria (SAN), backed this up, saying, we cannot predict the exactitude where this unfortunate disturbance
323 will take place, and thus we felt that a combined effort of all of us would be very necessary (Ayoola, 2019).

324 It is apparent from the foregoing that foiling kidnapping syndicates and their heinous operations in the region
325 requires the cooperation and partnership of multiple security agencies. Most importantly, it is clear that the
326 WNSN understands the region's terrain better than any other security agency in the region. Moreover, it is
327 common knowledge that no external forces can successfully penetrate a neighborhood to rid it of kidnapers
328 unless the residents of that neighborhood actively support or collaborate, which, of course, is where the WNSN
329 support role comes in. However, since early 2020, when the WNSN regional security outfit was endorsed by
330 the six southwestern governors, it has been supplying not only intelligence to the police but London Journal of
331 Research in Humanities and Social Sciences also leading the fight against kidnapping in the region.

332 WNSN, for example, has been proactive in assisting police and other state security forces, which has helped
333 to reduce the occurrence of kidnapping and hostage-taking activities in the southwest region. Recently, men
334 from Ekiti State's Amotekun Corps apprehended Abdurahman Ibrahim, a 30-year-old kidnapper who specializes
335 in abducting residents of Ijesa Isu in the state's Ikole Local Government Area. We discovered local protective
336 charms against gunshots on him. He pretended to be a cattle tender looking for the person who had given him
337 the cattle. The suspect was however handed over to police for a full investigation and possible prosecution (Brig.
338 Gen. Joe Komolafe (rtd), personal interview). 1 Bearing in mind that WNSN, with a subsidiary Amotekun
339 Corps, in each of the six states of Nigeria's southwest, is of course, a continuation of the ongoing debate on
340 community security. It has also demonstrated the problematic backdrop against which regional security emerges.
341 According to Nwoko (2021:1), 'the Amotekun initiative arose from the fallout of the region' and the country's
342 worsening security situation, which the Nigerian government has demonstrated a lack of capacity to address.'
343 The coordinated efforts of the region's major stakeholders (the governors of the six states) to promote and ensure
344 the security of citizens' lives and property, on the other hand, are regarded as a success in the fight against
345 kidnapping and hostage-taking, which previously dominated the region.

346 Despite the importance of regional security and WNSN, which has made significant strides in the fight against
347 kidnapping in the region, it has received a backlash from some quarters, with some declaring its establishment to
348 be illegal because it is not backed by any known law in the land, and as a result, they have remained coy on such
349 an approach to tame kidnapping and other security threats in the region. In a statement made 1 Interview with
350 the Ekiti State Amotekun Corps (ESAC) Commandant, Brig. Gen. Joe Komolafe (rtd), in Ado-Ekiti, ??pril 11,
351 2022, 11am-1pm available to Vanguard on January 9, 2020, Special Assistant on Media and Public Relations to
352 the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Dr. Umar Gwandu, criticized the establishment
353 of the outfit. The bulletin reads:

354 The formation of the security organization known as Amotekun is illegal and violates Nigerian law. The
355 Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution of 1999 (as amended) established the Army, Navy, and Air Force,
356 as well as the Police and numerous paramilitary organizations, for the purpose of Nigeria's defence (Vanguard
357 Newspaper, 2020). The Minister's statement appeared to be a reiteration of Okodolor's (2019) earlier position

358 that no State government, whether singly or in a group, has the legal right and competence to establish any form
359 of organization or agency for the defense of Nigeria or any of its constituent parts.

360 Regardless of the criticism leveled at the WNSN security outfit, the organization's activities are solely focused
361 on combating kidnapping and other security challenges in the region. According to Adetunbi & Adedigba
362 (2021:28), the aim of establishing the Amotekun security outfit is to ensure an end to insecurity in the
363 southwestern region of Nigeria. The WNSN team has received widespread acclaim for its serious and competent
364 approach to addressing kidnapping in the southwest. Visibly, the success of the NPF, NSCDC, and DSS in the
365 fight against kidnapping in the region is based on a shared understanding, effective partnership, and collaboration
366 with the WNSN. A huge part of the success has been made possible because of the better understanding of the
367 environment by identifying the major forests that serve as hideouts for kidnapping syndicates and gangs and an
368 upward supply of intelligence for NPF, NSCDC and SSS for seamless bursting of operation of kidnap members.
369 For the purpose of enlightening the general public most especially on vague issues bordering on how Amotekun
370 security team has been partnering other security agencies in the fight against kidnapping in the region, more often
371 than not, Amotekun outfit works closely with the DSS, and when it wants to carry out any London Journal of
372 Research in Humanities and Social Sciences operation, most times it engages men of the SSS, NSCDC, NPF and
373 all other forces (Chief Adetunji Adeyeye, personal interview). 2 The activities of kidnapers in the region have
374 been significantly disrupted as a result of the WNSN's active participation in intelligence gathering, merged with
375 the combined efforts of the NPF, DSS, NSCDC, and inter -and intra Special Forces. This growing cooperation
376 between the WNSN and security agencies has aided the forces in their efforts to rid the region of kidnapers and
377 reclaim the ungoverned spaces (forests) from the kidnapping gangs. As more space is taken away, kidnapers are
378 forced to flee the region for neighbouring states that do not share such cooperation, such as the southwest region,
379 where their activities have met with stiff resistance. Despite this, in less than three years since its inception;
380 the WNSN has made significant progress in combating kidnapping and other criminalities in the region. It can
381 however be strengthened further to become a dependable conglomerate on which other state security agencies
382 can rely for firepower and intelligence.

383 It is patent that the WNSN intelligence-gathering and regional anti-kidnapping initiatives have resulted in
384 some successes. Not that alone, the initiative seemed to be the missing link in the anti-kidnapping campaign
385 other security agencies in the region have long desired, with the string of support and onslaught culminating in
386 victories coming their way in the quest to rid the region of kidnapers and hostage takers. For instance, between
387 January and December 2021, the outfit captured 18 suspected criminals in possession of dangerous weapons
388 such as over 500 daggers, knives, and guns concealed in sacks loaded with tiger nuts in Ondo State as part
389 of its efforts to combat kidnapers and criminals in the region (Nigerian Tribune, 2021). Correspondingly, on
390 Saturday, December 25, 2021, the WNSN's Joint Patrol team rescued 11 people who were being held captive by
391 their abductors along the Ipetumodu-Ilesha expressway in Osun State. On Christmas Eve, the victims were said
392 to be We received a distress call around 1 a.m. from one of the families of the kidnapped victims, asking for
393 ransom. As a result, we took action. We were successful in locating the kidnapers. The victims were rescued,
394 and some of their belongings were recovered, but the kidnapers fled. It was along the Ipetumodu axis in Osun
395 State, and when we arrived at a village about 10 kilometers from the road, we discovered that the den is a regular
396 dump area for kidnapers because we discovered so many items indicating that it is a permanent place where
397 they keep kidnapped victims. Adetunji reaffirms that it is to reassure the people of Ondo and Osun States that
398 Amotekun will stop at nothing to join forces with other security agencies to ensure that criminals are driven
399 away from the states (Nigerian Tribune 2021).

400 On July 30, 2021, the men of the Oyo State Amotekun team, worked closely with local vigilantes and hunters,
401 and won another battle when they killed two kidnapers during an unsuccessful kidnapping attempt by the
402 kidnapers who stormed Iwere-Ile town in Oyo State, Nigeria. Weapons were recovered from the kidnapers and
403 turned over to the police, despite the fact that three other kidnap syndicate members managed to flee after being
404 shot (Daily Post, 2021). Equally, the WNSN team in Oyo State successfully dealt a major blow to kidnapers
405 who were operating in the state's forests near Ibarapa and Oke-Ogun areas. As stated by Retd Col. Olayinka
406 Olayanju in an interview: 'We had begun clearing out the dense forests surrounding the four councils that had
407 recently been the target of kidnapping and rape. At Aiyede, when our personnel entered the forest, they were
408 ambushed; this sparked a gunfight in which three of the assailants perished. In the process, one of our men
409 sustained little injury; on the whole, we London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences are
410 happy that he is recuperating fast from the hurt' (Retd Col. Olayinka Olayanju, personal interview). 3 However,
411 on April 24, 2022, the Amotekun, in collaboration with the police and vigilantes, were strategic in a raid on
412 a kidnapper's hideout in Ogun State, when the joint security forces stormed Abule Oba, off Ayetoro Road in
413 Abeokuta North Local Government Area, the kidnap syndicates were captured. While responding, the state's
414 police spokesman affirms that:

415 The police had received a tip that two commercial motorcyclists running errands for the kidnapping syndicate,
416 Hamed Taiwo and Kehinde Jimoh had been seen in the Rounder neighborhood of Abeokuta. During
417 questioning, they admitted to being a part of the syndicate but claimed that their primary responsibility was
418 to run errands and keep an eye on their surroundings to avoid being discovered by law enforcement. Their
419 confession aided authorities to find their hiding place, where they regularly gathered after demanding ransom
420 from their victims. Nine members of the syndicate were detained during the operation (Abimbola Oyeyemi,

5 V. CONCLUSION

421 personal interview). 4 In general, it appears that district partnerships and collaboration between the WNSN
422 Corps and state security agencies will continue to receive the full support of the southwest states. On the whole,
423 the fight against kidnapping and hostage-taking remains the responsibility of the Nigerian government, which
424 will require regional and community support to succeed. Though the region has faced opposition in the form of
425 constitutionality and legality from various quarters, most notably the Attorney General and Minister of Justice,
426 since the establishment of the security outfit, the obvious truth is that the region's outfit is making tremendous
427 efforts in combating kidnapping. The structure for collaboration and integration into the current anti-kidnapping
428 strategic approach, on the other hand, does not appear to be a primary focus for the central government.

429 Certainly, the government can provide better security by focusing more on the positive contributions of the
430 WNSN in protecting their communities, since no state can subdue kidnapping exclusively through state-sponsored
431 security agency operations. As a result, it is pivotal that the government, in partnership with WNSN, engages
432 in the region to better understand kidnapper hideouts and operating modes in the region.

5 V. CONCLUSION

433 The relevance of WNSN Corps as a key player in the regional effort to counter kidnapping in southwest Nigeria
434 has been articulated in this article. Given their sheer numbers, ingenuity, vitality, and local knowledge of the
435 region, which have fueled and added significant boost to locating kidnappers' hideouts, gathering intelligence, and
436 constantly rescuing and liberating kidnapped victims from the whims and caprices of their tormentors, WNSN,
437 as an institution in southwest Nigeria, without a doubt deserves to be seen as a key player in the ongoing fight
438 to thwart kidnapping, hostage-taking in the region.
439

440 Going by the current level of cooperation between WNSN, NPF, SSS, NSCDC, and other special forces in
441 the fight against kidnapping, which has recently made the region inhabitable for kidnap mafias, it is evident
442 that a more robust and long-lasting regional security option is required to defeat kidnapping in the southwest.
443 It must be emphasized that effective communication among the various Amotekun units, commanders, state
444 governors, NPF, SSS, NSCDC, and Special Forces in the area has also greatly aided the region's efforts to
445 combat kidnapping. This is especially true of the joint/combined border patrol among states against kidnappers
446 in the region, which is a significant advancement in the fight against kidnapping in the region. In this regard, it is
447 crucial to reconsider the common perception of WNSN in southwest Nigeria, and by extension, London Journal
448 of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences Nigeria, and to see it more as a constant source of creativity,
449 ingenuity, possibility, and serious obstacles for kidnapping operations in the region as opposed to symbol of
450 separation, misconception as ethnic supporting armed group, and as equipped tool in the hands of the region's
451 shenanigans.

452 Apart from the foregoing, it is pivotal to strengthen intelligence sharing among security agencies in the region
453 and its neighbours in order to tackle kidnapping. Moreover, regional and national forces must be vigilant in
454 foiling coordinated kidnapping assaults before they are carried out. To improve its effectiveness and offer a
455 better security chain, the WNSN Corps could also be structured a little more in a chain of command structures:
456 community, local government, state, and regional levels. Not just that; the emphasis must also be on giving
457 the group access to resources, training, and retraining, as well as some sort of legal backing. Most importantly,
458 personnel can be improved in the area of training and retraining in a periodic manner to keep the men of the
459 outfit with a modern method of securitization without resulting in human rights violations and security breaches.
460 In this regard, the WNSN Corps in the southwest would be a bulwark handy not only in the region's fight against
461 kidnapping but also in enhancing the national security architecture. ¹



Figure 1: 4

461

¹ The Western Nigeria Security Network and the Fight against Hostage-Taking and Kidnapping in the South-Western Region of Nigeria

security can best be promoted and maintained if local people have greater access to the intelligence-gathering process. Collaborations and partnerships with state security agencies can ensure the active participation of the local people in regional security. A strategic partnership between WNSN and state security agencies, in particular, will help people feel more connected to the anti-kidnapping effort. Broadly speaking, community security has embraced the value of partnerships development recognizing that the causes of domestic insurgency are diverse and complex, linked to a variety of social and economic conditions beyond the control of security agencies and frequently necessitating (Stabilisation Unit, 2014). However, noticeably in the Southwest, the fight against kidnapping strategy typically requires NPF, SSS,

). By doing so,

and collaboration
and program delivery,

a coordinated response

Figure 2:

Figure 3: 2

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