

**INTEGRATING TRADITIONALISM, MYSTICISM AND PLURAL POLICING INTO
NIGERIA’S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE:
A POSITION PAPER ON PROFESSIONALISM, ACCOUNTABILITY, JOINT OPERATIONS
AND COMMUNITY SECURITY IN YORUBALAND**

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Abstract

Nigeria’s security crisis in Yorubaland reflects the limits of conventional policing and military responses to territorial terrorism and mass kidnapping. This position paper argues for a synchronized framework that integrates four elements: 1) federal police reform under IGP Olatunji Rilwan Disu, 2) joint intelligence-led operations in Oyo and neighboring states, 3) regulated incorporation of traditionalism and mysticism into the security architecture, and 4) structured plural policing through community security programmes, neighbourhood policing, and regulated local militia groups. Drawing on Akinade’s *Internal Security, Law Enforcement and Justice System: African Traditional Perspectives* (2021) and *Community Security, Neighbourhood and Plural Policing: Principles and Practice* (2020), as well as procedural justice theory and comparative federal practice, the paper proposes a model where traditional intelligence, spiritual vigilance, and community defense mechanisms complement statutory agencies without replacing them. The conclusion is that sustainable security in Yorubaland requires professional policing, accountable joint operations, and lawful integration of community and traditional security actors.

Keywords: Plural Policing, Community Security, Traditional Security, Mysticism, Neighbourhood Policing, Nigeria Police Force, Joint Operations, Yorubaland

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1. Introduction

Nigeria's internal security architecture is strained by trust and capacity deficits within the Nigeria Police Force and by the emergence of territorial terrorism and mass kidnapping in sub-national spaces such as Yorubaland. Conventional responses have produced temporary tactical gains but little durable control of ungoverned forests and rural corridors.

Two developments create a policy window. In March 2026, IGP Olatunji Rilwan Disu assumed office with a mandate to professionalize, modernize, and rebuild public trust in the NPF. In August 2025, the Defence Headquarters announced it had identified the terrorist network behind the Oyo mass kidnapping and commenced joint operations with Amotekun, the NPF, and local hunters.

This paper argues that these tracks must be joined with a third and fourth: the regulated integration of legitimate traditional security systems and the structured deployment of plural policing through community security programmes, neighbourhood policing, and regulated local militia groups. When done under law and oversight, these layers provide early warning, deterrence, and community resilience that complement modern policing and military operations.

2. Background: Security Breakdown in Yorubaland

Between 2024 and 2026, Yorubaland experienced a surge in kidnapping, school abductions, and killings, particularly in Oyo, Ondo, and Ekiti states. The 21 May 2026 press statement by the Isese Welfare Association described these as a "dangerous new pattern" threatening the peace and survival of the Yoruba nation.

The Defence Headquarters response in August 2025 confirmed that a terrorist network was responsible and that joint clearance operations were underway in forest enclaves along the Oyo-Ogun border. Yet the persistence of attacks indicates that kinetic operations alone are insufficient without sustained holding, governance, and local intelligence.

3. Aim, Objectives, and Research Questions

Aim: To propose a framework for integrating professional policing, joint operations, regulated traditional security systems, and plural policing for durable security in Yorubaland.

Objectives:

1. Analyze the operational and governance implications of IGP Disu's reform and the Oyo operations.
2. Examine the structure and efficacy of traditional Yoruba crime prevention schemes.
3. Evaluate the role of community security programmes, neighbourhood policing, and regulated militia in crime prevention.
4. Develop a legal and ethical model for integrating these actors into Nigeria's security architecture.

4. Methodology

The paper uses doctrinal legal analysis, policy analysis, case study of Oyo operations, and comparative analysis of plural policing in federal systems. It draws on Akinade's Strategic Security Management Model and on field knowledge documented in Internal Security, Law Enforcement and Justice System: African

Traditional Perspectives (2021) and Community Security, Neighbourhood and Plural Policing: Principles and Practice (2020).

5. Literature Review

5.1 African Traditional Security Systems

Akinade (2021) documents how pre-colonial Yoruba polities used a combination of Opa, Awo, and community intelligence networks to prevent crime and maintain order. These systems relied on spiritual deterrence, social sanction, and rapid communal response.

5.2 Plural Policing and Community Security

Akinade (2020) argues that plural policing recognizes that security is produced by multiple actors: state police, private security, community groups, and traditional institutions. Effective plural policing requires coordination, legal clarity, and accountability.

5.3 Procedural Justice and Legitimacy

Bradford et al. (2014) establish that legitimacy increases cooperation. Integrating trusted community and traditional institutions can increase legitimacy if done transparently.

6. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

6.1 Plural Policing

Security is a networked function. No single agency can provide it. Coordination between state, market, and civil society actors is essential.

6.2 Subsidiarity

Security functions are most effective at the lowest competent level. Neighbourhood and traditional structures operate at the ward and village level, providing granularity that state agencies cannot.

6.3 Hold, Build, Transfer

Cleared areas must be held and governed. Community security programmes and regulated militia are suited for the “hold” and “build” phases through vigilance and early warning.

7. Analysis: IGP Disu’s Police Reform Agenda

IGP Disu’s agenda of professionalism, accountability, and community partnership provides the legal and institutional anchor for joint operations. Key reforms include dismantling “Keep In View” practices, empowering X-Squad and the Public Complaint Unit, and prioritizing intelligence-led policing. These reforms must extend to how the NPF interfaces with community and traditional actors in joint operations.

8. Analysis: DHQ’s Identification of the Oyo Kidnap Network

The identification of the network and commencement of joint operations mark a shift from reactive policing to targeted counter-terrorism. Success depends on holding cleared territory and integrating local intelligence. This is where regulated community and traditional actors add value.

9. Traditionalism and Mysticism in Yoruba Crime Prevention

Yoruba traditional crime prevention operated through three layers:

1. Spiritual Vigilance: Use of Ifa divination, eborá, and egungun systems for early warning and deterrence.
2. Communal Intelligence: Ward heads, market leaders, and age grades served as information nodes.
3. Organised Defense: Ode hunters, agbekoya and community militia provided rapid response under the authority of traditional rulers.

Akinade (2021) argues that these systems were not superstitious but functioned as social control mechanisms embedded in cosmology and customary law. They succeeded because they were legitimate, localized, and swift.

10. Plural Policing: Community Security Programmes and Neighbourhood Policing

Drawing on Akinade (2020), plural policing in the Nigerian context requires:

1. Community Security Programme Design and Planning: Needs assessments at ward level, clear objectives, resource mapping, and defined roles for police, local government, and community groups.
2. Community Involvement in Policing and Crime Prevention: Establishment of functional Community Policing Committees, ward security forums, and neighbourhood watch structures with direct liaison to DPOs.
3. Information Sharing Protocols: Secure channels for community intelligence to flow into fusion centers without exposing informants.

Neighbourhood policing shifts focus from reactive response to problem-solving and prevention at the street level. It builds trust and generates actionable intelligence.

11. Local and Informal Security Groups and Regulated Militia

Local hunters, vigilante groups, and community militia have filled gaps where state presence is weak. Unregulated, they risk abuse and ethnic conflict. Regulated, they become force multipliers.

Regulation requires:

1. Registration and vetting by state security councils.
2. Training in human rights, rules of engagement, and evidence preservation.
3. Clear prohibition on arrests and detention beyond immediate hand-over to police.
4. Operational command under joint task force structures with NPF and Amotekun.

Akinade (2020) emphasizes that informal groups must be “embedded, not outsourced.” They operate under statutory supervision, not in parallel.

12. The Convergence: Integrating Traditional, Professional and Joint Security

The proposed model has four tiers:

1. Federal/State Professional Layer: NPF, military, DSS provide legal authority, forensic capacity, and kinetic response.
2. Sub-National Operational Layer: Amotekun and regulated hunters conduct joint patrols and hold territory.

3. Community Security Layer: Neighbourhood watch, Community Policing Committees, and ward forums provide vigilance and problem-solving.
4. Traditional Intelligence Layer: Vetted traditional practitioners provide early warning and deterrence under a regulatory board.

Arrests, detention, and prosecution remain exclusively with statutory agencies. Other actors feed intelligence, provide deterrence, and support holding of cleared areas.

13. Legal and Ethical Framework for Integration

Integration must be grounded in:

- Section 4(7) and Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution: Security and welfare of the people as primary purpose of government.
- Police Act 2020: Defines roles of NPF and community policing.
- State Security Laws: Amotekun laws provide for community involvement.

Safeguards:

1. Registration and vetting of traditional and community actors by state security councils.
2. Code of conduct prohibiting torture, extortion, and ethnic targeting.
3. Mandatory reporting of intelligence to fusion centers.
4. Exclusion of kinetic operations and arrests from non-statutory actors' mandate.

14. Challenges and Risks

1. Abuse and vigilantism if integration is unregulated.
2. Ethnic profiling and reprisals.
3. Conflict with statutory agencies over authority.
4. Skepticism from civil society regarding mysticism and militia.
5. Demoralization of officers if accountability is one-sided.

15. Strategic Recommendations

15.1 Establish State Traditional and Community Security Integration Boards

Each South-West state should create a board to register, vet, and oversee traditional practitioners and community security groups.

15.2 Scale Community Security Programmes and Neighbourhood Policing

Implement ward-level security plans in priority LGAs. Link Community Policing Committees directly to DPOs and fusion centers.

15.3 Regulate and Embed Local Militia Groups

Register hunters and vigilante groups, train them, and place them under joint operational command.

15.4 Declare Protected Zones

Schools, farms, and sacred groves should have visible presence of Amotekun, forest guards, and regulated community vigilance.

15.5 Institutionalize Civilian Harm Mitigation

Adopt standards consistent with NAF-US cooperation on civilian protection and conduct after-action reviews.

15.6 Enforce Two-Way Accountability

Prosecute assaults on officers with the same visibility as officer misconduct cases. Establish a Uniform Personnel Legal Aid Unit.

16. Implementation and Coordination Framework

Phase 1: 0-3 Months

Establish boards, vet practitioners, set up fusion centers, launch joint operations and community security programmes in priority LGAs.

Phase 2: 3-9 Months

Clear priority forest corridors, deploy holding forces, initiate development projects, operationalize protected zones.

Phase 3: 9-18 Months

Consolidate control, transfer to civil authority, conduct impact evaluation.

Coordination: National-Subnational Security Coordination Council chaired by the NSA.

17. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

KPIs: Reduction in kidnapping, response time, prosecutions, community trust scores, civilian harm incidents.

Oversight: Independent Oversight Board with quarterly public reporting.

18. Two-Way Accountability: Protecting Lawful Authority and Civilian Rights

Accountability must run both ways. The NPF must discipline misconduct. The state must prosecute assault and obstruction of officers. This prevents demoralization and sustains joint operations.

19. Conclusion

Nigeria cannot secure Yorubaland with policing or military action alone. The path forward is a hybrid model that professionalizes the NPF, coordinates joint operations, and legally integrates legitimate traditional and community security actors. When traditionalism, mysticism, and plural policing are understood as sources of intelligence, deterrence, and community resilience, they become assets rather than liabilities. The rebranding of Nigeria's security architecture depends on this integration.

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21. Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Rules of Engagement for Joint Operations

1. Use of force only in self-defense or defense of others.
2. No detention beyond 24 hours without handover to Police.
3. Mandatory incident reporting within 12 hours.
4. Mandatory after-action review for civilian harm incidents.

Appendix B: Vetting Criteria for Traditional and Community Security Actors

1. Proven recognition by traditional council or community leadership.
2. No criminal record.
3. Training in human rights and rules of engagement.
4. Signed code of conduct and accountability mechanism.

Appendix C: Template for Community Security Programme Design

1. Ward-level threat and vulnerability assessment.
2. Resource mapping: personnel, infrastructure, communication.
3. Role definition for police, local government, community groups.
4. Monitoring and feedback mechanism.

Appendix D: Proposed Membership of National-Subnational Security Coordination Council

- National Security Adviser
- Chief of Defence Staff
- Inspector-General of Police
- Director-General, DSS
- Governors of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Lagos
- Representatives of Civil Society and Traditional Institutions.

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