

**THE BLOOD ON THE ALTAR:
RELIGIOUS TARGETING, INTELLIGENCE FAILURE, AND THE GOVERNANCE
OF FRONTIER INSECURITY IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

On 23 May 2026, armed assailants attacked Ori-Oke Ajaiye prayer mountain in Ekiti LGA, Kwara State, killing three worshippers and abducting fifteen during a night vigil. The incident, documented in both a field report and a crime scene image showing Nigeria Police forensic processing under drone surveillance, illustrates the displacement of kidnapping-for-ransom syndicates into Nigeria's Middle Belt, the tactical targeting of sacred space, and the persistent gap between reactive policing and intelligence-led prevention. This position paper analyzes the assault through the integrated framework of human security, strategic security management, intelligence systems, community policing, and legal documentation developed across 17 publications by the author from 2007 to 2025. It argues that the attack reflects intelligence failure, communication lag, and governance deficit, and proposes a policy framework centered on a National Information and Intelligence Fusion Centre, proactive security mapping of vulnerable sites, community-based early warning, and legal reclassification of religious-targeted mass abductions.

Keywords: Religious Targeting, Intelligence Failure, Frontier Insecurity, Middle Belt, Community Policing, Intelligence Fusion, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Nigeria's security crisis is no longer confined to the North East insurgency or North West banditry corridors. By May 2026, armed groups have migrated southward into Kwara State, historically a buffer between the volatile north and the stable south-west. The assault on Ori-Oke Ajaiye, a sacred prayer mountain in Ekiti LGA, exemplifies this shift. Three worshippers were executed during a night vigil; fifteen were abducted into the Kwara forests.

The crime scene image accompanying the field report shows Nigeria Police personnel processing the site: evidence markers beside bodies, prayer mats and Bibles preserved for documentation, and a drone conducting aerial surveillance over the forest edge. The visual record confirms both the gravity of the attack and the deployment of modern forensic and intelligence tools.

This paper treats the Ori-Oke incident as a case study within the broader problem of information risk, intelligence failure, and governance deficit. Drawing on 17 publications by the author, it examines how the targeting of religious space, the displacement of criminal syndicates, and the reactive posture of the state interact to undermine public trust and national security.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

2.1 Human Security and Sacred Space

Social and Human Security for Sustainable Development (2007) reframes security as the protection of individuals from physical, economic, and psychological threats. Religious sites such as Ori-Oke function as psychological sanctuaries where communities seek protection from state failure. National Security, Social Coercion and Sustainable Development (2008) argues that when the state cannot guarantee physical security, attacks on sacred space produce existential dread that erodes social cohesion.

2.2 Strategic Security and Frontier Management

Managing Strategic Security and Crime Prevention Models (2017) and Managing Strategic Security in Statecraft (2019) position security as a function of integrated planning, risk assessment, and public affairs. Frontier zones such as Kwara-Ekiti-Kogi borderlands require proactive mapping and deterrence, not reactive policing. Contemporary Security Issues in Governance and Statecraft (2018) shows that governance failure in border areas creates permissive environments for asymmetric actors.

2.3 Intelligence Systems and Fusion

Intelligence System: Principles and Practice (2015) defines intelligence as processed information meeting standards of accuracy, relevance, timeliness, and usability. Security and Criminal Intelligence For Law Enforcement (2021) applies this to criminal intelligence, emphasizing that compartmentalization and poor dissemination cause intelligence failure. The displacement of kidnapping syndicates into Kwara should have triggered fused tactical assessments and early warning.

2.4 Community Policing and Trust

Community Policing: Strategic Approaches In Crime Prevention (2018) establishes that public trust is a precondition for intelligence flow. Public Policing and Private Protection For Maximum Security (2017)

advocates harmonized roles between public police and private actors to ensure consistent messaging and coordinated response.

2.5 Communication and Documentation

Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations (2025) outlines protocols for unified crisis communication. Communication Skills in Security Documentation in Law Enforcement (2025) provides standards for incident reporting, evidence handling, and public debunking. The crime scene image demonstrates the application of these standards: preservation of religious materials as evidence, use of markers for forensic mapping, and aerial surveillance for terrain analysis.

2.6 Law of Armed Conflict and Domestic Law

The attack engages the principle of distinction under international humanitarian law and constitutes hostage-taking and terrorism under Sections 2(2) and 3(3) of the Terrorism Prevention Act 2022. Policing Terrorism, Insurgency and Weapons of Mass Destruction (2023) analyzes how targeting civilians and religious sites functions as psychological warfare.

3. Anatomy of the Ori-Oke Ajaiye Assault

On the night of 23 May 2026, armed assailants breached Ori-Oke Ajaiye during a night vigil led by Pastor Adebayo Abiodun. The initial gunfire was designed to shock and disorient kneeling worshippers. Three were executed immediately to establish control; fifteen were abducted into the forest.

The choice of location reflects a calculated tactical calculus. Prayer mountains are isolated by design to facilitate uninterrupted worship. They lack perimeter walls, gates, or armed guards. This isolation does not diminish the state's duty of care but increases the culpability of those who exploit it. The attack aligns with the pattern of syndicate migration from the North West into the Middle Belt as pressure increases in traditional theatres of conflict.

The Kwara State Police Command responded with a multi-tiered deployment: police drone team for aerial surveillance, Police Mobile Force for containment, and tactical/intelligence units for signals and human intelligence. The crime scene image confirms the deployment of drones and forensic teams, consistent with the intelligence-driven matrix described in the field report.

4. Legal and Operational Response

4.1 Domestic and International Legal Framework

The attack constitutes hostage-taking under Section 3(3) of the Terrorism Prevention Act 2022 and an act of terrorism under Section 2(2) of the same Act. It also violates Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, which prohibits attacks on places of worship that form part of the cultural or spiritual heritage of a people. The state's obligation under Sections 33 and 34 of the 1999 Constitution—to protect the right to life and dignity of the human person—was breached by the failure to prevent the attack.

4.2 Operational Challenges

The borderlands of Kwara, Ekiti, and Kogi consist of unpoliced forest reserves, old mining pits, and terrain that favors irregular fighters. Under LOAC principles of military necessity and proportionality, any state response must avoid disproportionate harm to hostages and civilians. This requires real-time intelligence fusion and precise targeting, which is absent when response is reactive.

5. Intelligence Failure, Communication Lag, and Trust Erosion

5.1 Intelligence Failure

The emergence of attacks in Kwara after intensified operations in the North West indicates a failure to fuse tactical intelligence across state lines. Intelligence System: Principles and Practice (2015) argues that pattern recognition in a defined corridor should trigger preventive operations. The absence of such operations points to compartmentalization and weak inter-agency sharing.

5.2 Communication Lag

The Kwara State Police Command's public statement described the assault as "gruesome" and "baric," but did not provide a fused assessment or immediate public assurance. Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations (2025) notes that delayed messaging creates an information vacuum filled by speculation and political accusation.

5.3 Trust Erosion

When sacred space is violated and the state responds only after the fact, public trust declines. Community Policing (2018) shows that trust is the foundation of community intelligence. Without it, the intelligence cycle breaks down, making future attacks more likely.

6. Socio-Cultural Desecration and Strategic Implications

Ori-Oke sites are not merely religious locations; they are socio-cultural institutions that compensate for the state's failure to provide economic and physical security. The desecration of the altar represents an assault on the moral fabric of the region.

Communal Conflict and Violence (2009) warns that such desecration can trigger reprisals and deepen communal divisions. Policing Terrorism, Insurgency and Weapons of Mass Destruction (2023) notes that attacks on education and faith are central to the ideological strategy of groups seeking to delegitimize the state.

7. Integrated Policy Framework

7.1 National Information and Intelligence Fusion Centre

Establish a centre to aggregate open-source, social media, and agency intelligence on threats to religious and educational institutions within two hours of detection. Produce fused assessments for operational commanders and the public. This operationalizes Intelligence System: Principles and Practice (2015) and addresses failure points in Security and Criminal Intelligence For Law Enforcement (2021).

7.2 Proactive Security Mapping and Hardening

Conduct systematic security mapping of all isolated religious and educational institutions in border communities. Enforce minimum hardening standards under state building codes, as recommended in Community Policing (2018) and Standard Performance Culture (2021).

7.3 Community-Based Early Warning

Integrate local hunters, vigilante groups, and faith leaders into state-backed intelligence networks under strict legal oversight. This builds on the community policing model in Community Policing (2018) and reduces the isolation that makes prayer mountains vulnerable.

7.4 Professionalized Crisis Communication

Establish 24/7 public information units with pre-approved templates for attacks on religious sites. Ensure statements are issued within two hours, per Communications in Security and Law Enforcement Operations (2025).

7.5 Legal Reclassification and Sentencing

Create a distinct, aggravated offence for mass kidnappings from religious sites under state penal codes, with mandatory sentencing guidelines that reflect the gravity of spiritual desecration.

7.6 Standardized Documentation and Evidence Management

Implement the protocols in Communication Skills in Security Documentation in Law Enforcement (2025) to ensure that crime scene processing, evidence handling, and public statements meet legal standards for prosecution. The image of the Ori-Oke scene demonstrates the practical application of these protocols.

8. Conclusion

The Ori-Oke Ajaiye assault is not an isolated criminal act. It is a symptom of intelligence failure, communication lag, and governance deficit in Nigeria's frontier zones. The targeting of sacred space represents a shift toward psychological warfare aimed at breaking societal resilience.

Addressing this requires moving from reactive policing to strategic security governance that integrates intelligence fusion, professional communication, standardized documentation, community trust-building, and legal reform. The body of work from 2007 to 2025 provides a roadmap for this transition.

Securing Nigeria's frontier requires defending not only territory but also the sanctity of the spaces where citizens seek refuge from insecurity. The state must act to close the gap between intelligence, communication, and public trust, or risk losing all three.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Protocol for Rapid Verification and Debunking of Attacks on Religious Sites

Appendix B: Template for Public Security Communication in Faith-Based Crisis Events

Appendix C: Checklist for Lawful and Admissible Documentation of Mass Abduction Cases

Appendix D: Framework for National Information and Intelligence Fusion Centre

Appendix E: Community Early Warning and Mediation Model for Frontier Insecurity

Appendix F: Minimum Security Hardening Standards for Isolated Religious Institutions.

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