

CUTTING THE “OXYGEN” OF TERRORISM: COMMUNITY INTELLIGENCE, CITIZEN RESPONSIBILITY, AND STRATEGIC SECURITY STATECRAFT IN NIGERIA’S COUNTERINSURGENCY EFFORT 2026

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ABSTRACT

This position paper analyzes Defence Minister General Christopher Musa’s June 2026 statement at The Platform Nigeria that local informants providing food, water, information, logistics and funding constitute “the oxygen” sustaining terrorism, banditry and insurgency in Nigeria. The Minister’s identification of the “enemy within” reframes Nigeria’s counterterrorism challenge from kinetic operations to community-based prevention. Using security studies, criminology and democratic governance frameworks, this paper applies the author’s 8 published works 2004-2026, specifically Akinade 2007 on crime prevention and Akinade 2009 on Response-Resolution-Prevention, to argue that eliminating terrorism requires severing civilian-criminal linkages through protected community intelligence structures, trust-building between citizens and state, and addressing socio-economic incentives for collaboration. The paper provides 15 policy recommendations for Executive, Legislature, security agencies, ISN and civil society to operationalize citizen security partnership and deny terrorists access to community resources.

Keywords: Community Intelligence, Counterterrorism, Civil-Military Relations, Crime Prevention, Security Statecraft, Democratic Consolidation, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

On 12th June 2026, Defence Minister General Christopher Musa ret'd. addressed The Platform Nigeria discourse themed "Governance, Democracy and National Security". He stated that the fight against terrorism, banditry and insurgency remains difficult because terrorists and bandits "survive among the people" who provide food, water, information and logistics. He termed this civilian support "the oxygen" of criminal operations and declared that "everything revolves around the people".

The Minister contrasted conventional state-to-state warfare, where enemies are identifiable, with contemporary threats where "the enemy is within". He warned that the individual being protected may become the number one threat and stressed that security agencies' efforts will remain limited without active citizen cooperation and unity.

This paper examines the policy implications of the "oxygen" diagnosis for Nigeria's counterinsurgency strategy. The Institute of Security Nigeria ISN contends that while kinetic operations are necessary, victory requires denying terrorists access to community resources through strategic security statecraft and citizen partnership.

2. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Method: Critical Discourse Analysis of Defence Minister's statement and Policy Gap Analysis of current counterterrorism architecture.

Frameworks Applied:

1. Akinade 2007 Security Operations, Crime Prevention and Good Governance: Criminal operations depend on environmental opportunity, concealment and support networks.
2. Akinade 2009 Communal Conflict and Violence: Response, Resolution, Prevention: Sustainable peace requires three stages.
3. Akinade 2008 National Security and Social Coercion: Insurgents exploit societal divisions.
4. Akinade 2018 Security, Governance and Statecraft: Deployment of coercive and non-coercive power.
5. Human Security Framework UNDP 1994: Freedom from fear requires community trust.

3. EVOLUTION OF SECURITY THREATS: FROM CONVENTIONAL WARFARE TO "ENEMY WITHIN"

Nigeria's security landscape has shifted from conventional threats to asymmetric non-state actors. Boko Haram since 2009, ISWAP, banditry in North-West, and kidnapping networks operate without uniforms, within civilian populations, and dependent on local logistics.

The Minister's "enemy within" paradigm highlights three operational realities:

1. Concealment: Fighters live among civilians.
2. Logistics Dependence: Terrorists rely on local food, water, shelter and intelligence rather than state supply chains.
3. Recruitment: Community grievances and weak governance provide manpower.

This evolution means military force alone cannot achieve "complete elimination" as noted by the Minister. Denial of community resources becomes decisive.

4. ANALYSIS OF DEFENCE MINISTER'S STATEMENT

4.1 Core Assertions

1. Active support from sponsors and members of the public sustains criminal groups.
2. Terrorists rely on locals for food, water, information, logistics, funding.
3. "Everything revolves around the people" - citizen will determines outcome.
4. Conventional warfare is easier due to identifiable enemies.
5. "Enemy within" is most dangerous aspect of campaigns.
6. Success limited without citizen support and cooperation.
7. Unity is necessary because terrorists exploit societal gaps.

4.2 Critical Policy Questions Raised

The diagnosis raises three questions for policy design:

1. Why do citizens provide oxygen? Drivers include coercion, economic incentive, ideological alignment, ethnic solidarity, and distrust of state.
2. What protected channels exist for citizens to reject and expose collaborators?
3. How can security agencies transition from demanding information to earning trust?

5. THEORETICAL APPLICATION: AKINADE 2007 AND 2009 FRAMEWORKS

5.1 Akinade 2007: Environmental Support for Crime

Akinade 2007 establishes that crime operations require environmental conditions of opportunity and support. Terrorist logistics in Nigeria conform to this model. Cutting oxygen requires removing environmental support through target hardening, surveillance, and community vigilance.

5.2 Akinade 2009: Response-Resolution-Prevention Model

National counterterrorism strategy emphasizes Response via military operations and Resolution via Operation Safe Corridor surrenders. Prevention is underdeveloped. Prevention requires:

1. Community early warning systems.
2. Addressing socio-economic drivers of collaboration.
3. Building citizen trust in state institutions.
4. Protection for informants against retaliation.

5.3 "Oxygen" as Social Capital Conversion

Terrorists convert community social capital into operational capital. Counterstrategy must convert same social capital into state intelligence capital.

6. CIVIL-MILITARY TRUST DEFICIT AND SOCIAL CONTRACT

The Minister's assertion that success is "extremely difficult" without people's support reveals trust deficit between citizens and security agencies. Contributing factors:

1. Historical human rights violations by security forces.
2. Delayed or absent response to community distress calls.
3. Fear of reprisal for being labeled informant.
4. Absence of visible protection for cooperating citizens.

Democratic governance requires restoring social contract: citizens provide information, state provides security and protection. Without this, communities rationally choose neutrality.

7. GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL SECURITY: INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The discourse theme links three domains with direct implications:

Executive: Must institutionalize community intelligence structures beyond military intelligence.

Legislature: Must enact laws protecting informants and mandating community security structures.

Judiciary: Must ensure swift prosecution of confirmed collaborators while protecting rights of accused.

Local Government: As tier closest to people, LG chairmen must coordinate community security committees.

8. COMPARATIVE MODELS: COMMUNITY INTELLIGENCE SYSTEMS

Relevant international models:

1. United Kingdom Prevent Strategy: Community engagement against radicalization.

2. Colombia 2002-2010: Anonymous tip lines that degraded FARC logistics.

3. Philippines Barangay Intelligence Networks: Local officials as first intelligence line.

Common element: state provides protection and incentive, community provides intelligence.

9. GAPS IN CURRENT COUNTERTERRORISM ARCHITECTURE

1. Absence of national anonymous reporting platform with legal protection.

2. Limited reintegration support for communities that reject terrorists.

3. Weak witness protection for informants in terrorism cases.

4. Over-reliance on military intelligence vs human intelligence from civilians.

5. Insufficient operationalization of LG-level security committees.

10. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Federal Government:

1. Establish National Community Intelligence Portal with anonymity and witness protection.

2. Launch “Cut the Oxygen” public campaign on how civilian support sustains terrorism.

3. Provide socio-economic incentives for communities that actively reject terrorists.

National Assembly:

4. Enact Community Security and Witness Protection Act 2026.

5. Mandate quarterly Defence Ministry report on percentage of operations based on civilian intelligence.

6. Approve funding for LG-level Conflict Prevention Committees.

Security Agencies:

7. Shift from demanding information to earning trust through rapid response to alerts.

8. Deploy Civil-Military Cooperation units to rebuild trust in affected LGAs.

9. Create reward system for actionable intelligence.

Institute of Security Nigeria:

10. Develop training manual for LG officials on community intelligence.

11. Conduct trust audits between communities and security agencies.
12. Provide security education modules for schools on rejecting extremism.

Civil Society:

13. Monitor human rights compliance in operations.
14. Facilitate dialogue between communities and security agencies.
15. Track public perception of security agencies versus terrorist groups.

11. ROLES OF STATE INSTITUTIONS

Legislature: Law-making and oversight. Executive: Policy and resource allocation. Judiciary: Prosecution and protection. Local Government: Intelligence node and first response. Citizens: Active rejection of criminal elements as called for by Minister.

12. CONCLUSION

General Musa's statement that "the enemy within is most dangerous" marks strategic shift. Nigeria's counterterrorism war will be won or lost in communities, not only on battlefields. As Minister stated, "Everything revolves around the people".

Per Akinade 2009, prioritizing Prevention alongside Response is required to cut oxygen. Democratic Nigeria must secure citizens so citizens can secure the state. Security agencies' labours will yield full results only when communities withdraw oxygen from terrorists. ISN commits to supporting citizen security partnership through research, training and policy advisory.

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