

SECURING NIGERIA'S FUTURE THROUGH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN COMBATING SECURITY CHALLENGES, TERRORISM, INSURGENCY, BANDITRY, KIDNAPPING AND VIOLENT ATTACKS, ASYMMETRIC AND HYBRID THREATS

Barrister Adebayo Akinade, dfisn

Deputy President & Chief Executive,

Institute of Security Nigeria

Email: bayoakinade77@gmail.com | bayoakinade@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

Nigeria's security landscape is defined by complex, overlapping threats: terrorism, insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, violent attacks, and emerging asymmetric and hybrid threats. This position paper argues that strategic communications is not a support function but a central instrument of national security. Drawing on Nigerian and international scholarship, including works on security management, policing frameworks, territorial conflicts, and community security, the paper defines and explains key terms, analyzes causes and tools of security challenges, and applies relevant theories and conceptual frameworks to Nigeria's context. It examines prospects, opportunities, problems, and challenges arising from poor communication management in security operations, and provides comparative insights from states that have successfully integrated communications into counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for institutionalizing strategic communications across Nigeria's security architecture to secure the nation's future.

Keywords: Strategic Communications, National Security, Terrorism, Insurgency, Banditry, Hybrid Threats, Asymmetric Warfare, Counter-Narratives, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Since 2009, Nigeria has confronted escalating security challenges ranging from Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, banditry and kidnapping in the Northwest, separatist agitations in the Southeast, to communal conflicts and violent attacks across the Middle Belt. These threats have evolved into asymmetric and hybrid forms, blending conventional violence with disinformation, psychological operations, and transnational linkages. While kinetic operations remain necessary, the failure to control narratives, manage perceptions, and communicate policy has allowed non-state actors to recruit, radicalize, and undermine state legitimacy.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Security challenges in Nigeria are exacerbated by communication gaps between government, security agencies, communities, and the media. Misinformation, delayed official responses, and absence of counter-narratives create an information vacuum filled by terrorist propaganda and bandit narratives. Strategic communications, if properly deployed, can degrade enemy will, build public resilience, and enhance inter-agency coordination. The absence of a coherent national strategic communications framework remains a critical vulnerability. This gap reflects weaknesses in managerial and operational skills within Nigeria's security sector.[Akinade][2007a]

1.3 Objectives of the Paper

1. To define and explain key terms and concepts related to security challenges and strategic communications.
2. To analyze causes, tools, and implications of Nigeria's security challenges with emphasis on communication dimensions.
3. To review relevant literature, theories, and conceptual frameworks including Nigerian perspectives on security systems and policing.
4. To examine prospects, opportunities, problems, and challenges in deploying strategic communications.
5. To provide comparative insights and policy recommendations for securing Nigeria's future.

1.4 Methodology

This paper adopts qualitative desk review and content analysis of academic literature, government documents, media reports, and comparative case studies. It applies a conceptual and theoretical framework to analyze Nigeria's security-communication nexus.

2.0 DEFINITIONS, DESCRIPTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS OF KEY TERMS

2.1 Strategic Communications

Strategic communications refers to the coordinated use of communication tools, messages, and channels to achieve national security objectives. It involves shaping perceptions, building trust, countering disinformation, and synchronizing messaging across government and security institutions. In security and law enforcement operations, it includes organizational and managerial communication, crisis and risk communication, and systems for managing security challenges.[Paul][2011][Akinade][2024]

2.2 National Security

National security is the condition in which a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, citizens, and values are protected from internal and external threats. It encompasses military, economic, social, and information dimensions. Sustainable national security requires social cohesion and development.[Buzan][Akinade][2008]

2.3 Terrorism

The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence against civilians to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives through fear.[UNSC][2004]

2.4 Insurgency

An organized armed struggle by a group seeking to overthrow or undermine the authority of a government through guerrilla tactics and popular support.[Kilcullen][2010]

2.5 Banditry

Organized criminal violence involving armed robbery, cattle rustling, and mass kidnapping for ransom, often in rural areas with weak state presence and weak policing frameworks.[Agbiboa][2021][Akinade][2004]

2.6 Kidnapping

The forcible abduction and detention of persons for ransom, political leverage, or intimidation. In Nigeria, it has become an economic enterprise linked to banditry and terrorism.[Onuoha][2018]

2.7 Asymmetric Threats

Conflicts where opposing forces differ significantly in military capability, tactics, and resources, forcing weaker actors to use unconventional methods.[Arreguin-Toft][2001]

2.8 Hybrid Threats

Threats that combine conventional and unconventional tactics, cyber operations, disinformation, and criminal activity to exploit state vulnerabilities.[NATO][2015]

2.9 Crisis and Risk Communication

The process of exchanging information and advice between experts, government officials, and the public during emergencies. Effective crisis communication reduces panic and enhances compliance with security directives.[Akinade][2024]

2.10 Territorial Conflicts

Disputes over control of land and resources, often across borders, requiring specialized prevention and response strategies that integrate security and communication.[Akinade][2007b]

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Strategic Communications and National Security

Western scholarship emphasizes strategic communications as a “force multiplier” in counter-terrorism. Paul argues that winning the “war of ideas” is as critical as kinetic operations. Nigerian scholarship highlights the role of environment, organizational communication, and strategic approaches in managing security problems. Principles of security systems and public safety in Nigeria require integrated communication policies.[Paul][2011][Ojo][2014][Akinade][2024][2009a]

3.2 Causes of Security Challenges in Nigeria

Literature identifies multiple drivers: poverty, unemployment, weak governance, porous borders, proliferation of small arms, and ethnic/religious polarization. Communication failures amplify these causes by enabling rumor, mistrust, and radical narratives. Weak organizational and managerial communication within the security sector further compounds coordination failures. Policing structures lacking clear development and strategy worsen response times.[Nwaodu & Chukwu][2020][Alemika][2013][Akinade][2004][2007a]

3.3 Tools and Implications

Tools include social media, satellite broadcasting, psychological operations, and community engagement. Implications of poor communication include loss of public trust, recruitment of youth by violent groups, and international reputational damage. Crisis communication during emergencies is critical to prevent escalation and misinformation. Managerial skills are essential to deploy these tools effectively.[Sheafer & Gabay][2009][Akinade][2024][2007a]

3.4 Nigerian Perspectives on Security Systems and Community Conflicts

Akinade emphasizes that security systems must integrate communication policies with law enforcement and criminal justice practices. Managing security in public institutions and parliaments requires structured communication protocols. Community conflicts and violence must be addressed through structured responses, resolution mechanisms, and prevention frameworks that involve local stakeholders. Social cohesion is the panacea to conflicts, violence, and xenophobia.[Akinade][2009a][2009b][2008][2009c]

4.0 PHILOSOPHICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Philosophical Basis

The paper adopts a pragmatic philosophy: security is achieved not only through force but through perception management and legitimacy. The state must compete for the “hearts and minds” of citizens. Logic thinking and innovation in protection systems require accurate perception management.[Kilcullen][2010][Akinade][2025]

4.2 Conceptual Framework: The Strategic Communications Cycle in Security Operations

Drawing on principles of operational frameworks for policing and managerial security practice:

1. Environmental Analysis: Understand security environment, territorial issues, and audience perceptions.

2. Strategy Development: Define objectives, key messages, and communication systems based on organizational skills.
3. Execution: Deploy messages through credible channels including crisis communication protocols.
4. Evaluation: Measure impact and adapt approaches to security challenges.[U.S. Joint Chiefs][2012][Akinade][2004][2024]

4.3 Integration with National Security Architecture

Strategic communications must be embedded in the intelligence cycle, operational planning, and post-conflict stabilization. Organizational communication ensures inter-agency coherence and effective policing structures.[Akinade][2004]

5.0 RELEVANT THEORIES

5.1 Framing Theory

Media and government frame events in ways that influence public interpretation. Terrorist groups use framing to portray the state as illegitimate. Strategic communication must reframe security narratives.[Entman][1993]

5.2 Social Identity Theory

Tajfel's theory explains how insurgent groups build in-group loyalty by emphasizing identity and demonizing the "other". Counter-narratives must address identity needs through targeted communication to promote social cohesion.[Tajfel & Turner][Akinade][2008]

5.3 Agenda-Setting Theory

Media determines what the public thinks about. Strategic communications must set the agenda by prioritizing security achievements and policy clarity.[McCombs & Shaw][1972]

5.4 Narrative Warfare Theory

Non-state actors win by controlling stories. The state must develop compelling national narratives of unity, justice, and development through structured communication systems and logical thinking.[Rid][2013][Akinade][2025]

6.0 CAUSES OF SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: COMMUNICATIONS DIMENSION

6.1 Structural Causes

Poverty, unemployment, poor education, and governance deficits create recruitment pools for violent groups.

6.2 Communication-Specific Causes

1. Information Vacuum: Delayed official statements after attacks.
2. Fragmented Messaging: Different security agencies issue conflicting reports due to poor organizational communication and weak operational frameworks.
3. Weak Counter-Narratives: Failure to challenge extremist ideology through strategic approaches.

4. Poor Community Engagement: Lack of trusted local communicators and risk communication protocols for conflict resolution.
5. Disinformation: Spread of fake news on social media about security operations.
6. Territorial Communication Gaps: Inadequate communication across border communities affected by territorial conflicts.[Agbiboa][2021][Onuoha][2018][Akinade][2004][2007b][2024]

7.0 TOOLS OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Organizational and Managerial Communication: Internal coordination among DSS, Police, Military, and NIA based on managerial skills. Implication: Prevents contradictory messaging.
- 7.2 Crisis and Risk Communication: Rapid response during emergencies and attacks. Implication: Controls panic and builds public confidence.
- 7.3 Communication Systems: Secure platforms for inter-agency data sharing and public dissemination.
- 7.4 Traditional Media: Radio, TV, newspapers. Implication: Broad reach in rural areas but limited interactivity.
- 7.5 Digital Media: Social media, blogs, messaging apps. Implication: Rapid spread of both information and disinformation.
- 7.6 Community-Based Communication: Town halls, religious leaders, traditional rulers. Implication: Builds trust and early warning for conflict prevention.
- 7.7 Strategic Approaches in Security Operations: Application of principles, policies, and practices in Nigeria's security systems to guide communication.[Sheafer & Gabay][2009][Akinade][2024][2009a]

8.0 PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Youth Engagement: Nigeria's large youth population can be mobilized for peace messaging.
2. Technology: Mobile penetration allows targeted SMS and USSD campaigns for risk communication.
3. Civil Society: NGOs and media can amplify government messages.
4. Diaspora: Nigerians abroad can counter negative international narratives.
5. Regional Cooperation: ECOWAS platforms for shared communication strategies on cross-border issues.
6. Institutional Learning: Application of strategic approaches in security operations and managerial skills to improve coordination.
7. Social Cohesion: Leveraging national unity narratives as a panacea to violence and xenophobia.[Bello & Yusuf][2019][Akinade][2007b][2008][2024]

9.0 PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

1. Institutional Silos: No single agency coordinates strategic communications across the security sector due to weak operational frameworks.
2. Capacity Deficit: Limited training in organizational and managerial communication for security personnel.
3. Political Interference: Messaging politicized during elections.
4. Resource Constraints: Underfunding of public information departments and communication systems.
5. Trust Deficit: Public skepticism due to past government failures in crisis communication.
6. Legal Issues: Balancing free speech with regulation of hate speech and terrorism content.

7. Community Resistance: Poor perception management in communities affected by conflicts and violence.[Nwaodu & Chukwu][2020][Alemika][2013][Akinade][2007a][2009c][2025]

10.0 COMPARATIVE INSIGHTS AND EXPOSITION ANALYSIS

10.1 United Kingdom – CONTEST Strategy

The UK’s “Prevent” strand uses community engagement and counter-narratives to stop radicalization. Lesson: Institutionalize communications within national security strategy.[UK Home Office][2018]

10.2 Kenya – National Counter Terrorism Centre

Kenya uses “Nyumba Kumi” community policing with integrated communication to detect threats. Lesson: Localize messaging and strengthen policing structures.[Mutuma][2017][Akinade][2004]

10.3 Israel – Hasbara

Israel invests heavily in strategic communication to explain security actions globally. Lesson: Consistency and speed in crisis communication matter.[Seib][2012]

10.4 Nigeria – Current Gaps

Unlike these states, Nigeria lacks a unified strategic communications doctrine. Messages are reactive, not proactive. Nigerian scholarship on security systems, policing frameworks, and community conflict resolution provides a foundation for closing this gap.[Akinade][2004][2009a][2009c]

11.0 ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES RAISED

The persistence of terrorism, banditry, and kidnapping in Nigeria cannot be separated from communication failures and weak managerial skills. When security agencies fail to explain operations, terrorists explain them instead. When government fails to offer a national narrative, separatists offer one. Territorial conflicts across borders are worsened by poor communication between communities and security agencies. Strategic communications, encompassing environment analysis, organizational communication, crisis and risk communication, and strategic systems, must therefore be treated as a core security capability. Integration with intelligence, surveillance, and investigations will close the loop between information and action. Security perceptions and logical thinking are critical to innovation in protection systems.[Akinade][2004][2007a][2007b][2009a][2017][2025]

12.0 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a National Strategic Communications Centre under the Office of National Security Adviser to coordinate organizational and managerial communication across all security agencies based on modern security practices.
2. Develop a National Counter-Narrative Strategy targeting Boko Haram, bandits, and separatist propaganda using strategic approaches in security operations.
3. Train Security Personnel in crisis and risk communication, media relations, and digital literacy as part of managerial and operational skills development.

4. Strengthen Communication Systems for inter-agency coordination and public dissemination during emergencies.
5. Strengthen Community Communication Networks using traditional rulers and religious leaders for conflict resolution and prevention.
6. Address Territorial Conflicts through cross-border communication strategies and security solutions.
7. Regulate Disinformation through law while protecting free speech.
8. Promote Social Cohesion through communication policies that address xenophobia and violence.[U.S. Joint Chiefs][Akinade][2007a][2007b][2008][2009a][2012]

13.0 CONCLUSION

Securing Nigeria's future requires more than weapons and operations. It demands winning the battle of narratives through structured strategic communications grounded in managerial skills, operational frameworks, and community security principles. Communication in security and law enforcement operations, including environmental analysis, organizational and managerial communication, and crisis and risk communication, provides the tools needed to degrade terrorist recruitment, build public resilience, and restore trust in the state. Addressing territorial conflicts and promoting social cohesion are essential complements. Without strategic communication, kinetic victories will be temporary. With it, Nigeria can turn communication into a strategic weapon against asymmetric and hybrid threats.[Akinade][2004][2007a][2008][2024]

REFERENCES

1. Agbiboa, D.E. "Banditry and the Politics of Insecurity in Nigeria". *African Security*, 14: 273-291, 2021.
2. Alemika, E.E.O. "Criminal Victimization, Policing and Governance in Nigeria". *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 6: 17-41, 2013.
3. Akinade, A. *Operational Framework For Policing: Development, Structures, Skills and Strategies*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2004.
4. Akinade, A. *Managerial and Operational Skills For Modern Security Practices*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2007a.
5. Akinade, A. *Territorial Conflicts And Cross-Borders Issues: Prevention, Responses, And Security Solutions*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2007b.
6. Akinade, A. *National Security, Social Cohesion And Sustainable Development: Panacea To Conflicts, Violence And Xenophobia*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2008.
7. Akinade, A. *Security Systems, Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice And Public Safety: Principles, Policies and Practices In Nigeria*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2009a.
8. Akinade, A. *Managing Security In Public Institutions and Parliaments*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2009b.
9. Akinade, A. *Community Conflicts and Violence: Responses, Resolution and Prevention*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2009c.
10. Akinade, A. *Communication In Security And Law Enforcement Operations*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2024.
11. Akinade, A. *Security Perceptions, Logic Thinking and Innovations For Criminal Justice And Protection Systems*. Lagos: Institute of Security Nigeria, 2025.
12. Arreguin-Toft, I. "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict". *International Security*, 26: 93-128, 2001.

13. Bello, K.B. & Yusuf, T. "Cross-Border Crime and Insecurity in West Africa: The Nigerian Experience". *African Security Review*, 28: 89-103, 2019.
14. Buzan, B. *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1983.
15. Entman, R.M. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". *Journal of Communication*, 43: 51-58, 1993.
16. Kilcullen, D. *Counterinsurgency*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
17. Lowenthal, M.M. *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*. 7th Ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2017.
18. McCombs, M.E. & Shaw, D.L. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36: 176-187, 1972.
19. Mutuma, R. "Community Policing and Counter-Terrorism in Kenya". *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 10: 45-60, 2017.
20. NATO. *Wales Summit Declaration*. Cardiff, 2015.
21. Nwaodu, N. & Chukwu, I. "Inter-Agency Collaboration and National Security in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects". *Journal of Security Studies and Management*, 4: 45-60, 2020.
22. Ojo, T. "Government Communication and Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria". *Journal of African Media Studies*, 6: 149-165, 2014.
23. Onuoha, F.C. "The Economics of Kidnapping in Nigeria". *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 7: 6, 2018.
24. Paul, C. *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011.
25. Rid, T. *Cyber War Will Not Take Place*. London: Hurst & Company, 2013.
26. Seib, P. *Real-Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power in the Social Media Era*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
27. Sheafer, T. & Gabay, I. "Mediated Public Diplomacy: A Strategic Contest over International Agenda Building and Frame Building". *Political Communication*, 26: 447-467, 2009.
28. Suberu, R.T. *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009.
29. Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979.
30. UK Home Office. *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism*. London, 2018.
31. United Nations Security Council. Resolution 1566, 2004.
32. U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Publication 3-13.2: Military Information Support Operations*. Washington, DC, 2012.

Barrister Adebayo Akinade, dfisn
 Deputy President & Chief Executive
 Institute of Security Nigeria