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Insecurity and Civil Society Response in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective and its Implications for Peace and Development

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Abstract

Insecurity is rife in Nigeria. This violence-ridden stage has triggered self-help methods with attendant proliferation of arms. Ethnic sentiments are common resulting in institution of ethnic militias. Parochialism characterizes these security measures which in the long run wedges war against security and peaceful co-existence of humans. In the hands of myriads of groups and individuals, a jigsaw security network is presented and this at best promotes insecurity. Government incompetence tolerates and backs various security methods; hence, the prevalence. It is clear in this paper that governmental failure cannot be mended with bogus and amorphous security groups. Compromised governmental backing of self-help methods intensifies insecurity where the parochial interest of the government in power is projected and protected by the vigilante or self-help groups. Various forms and levels of vigilante, risks inherent in

them as well as the consequences of their unchecked existence are discussed. Recommendations are made as way out of the woods. Provision of security is fundamental to peace, progress and development. Self-help method at best represents the parochial and limited interest of persons or groups and often conflict. It cannot be a good complement to governmental mandate so long as governmental overhaul of etiquette for a secure environment continues to be treated with levity and ambivalence.

Key words: security, arms, violence, insecurity, self-help, vigilante.

Introduction

The importance of security to man has been quite deep in history. Humans from time have sought ways to address security problems especially when confidence reposed in the government as custodian of human safety is lost. Security as defined by Wikipedia ‘is the degree of resistance to, or protection from harm..... {and} applies to any vulnerable and valuable asset such as a person, dwelling, community, nation or organization.’ It further explains, citing the Institute for Security and Open Methodologies (ISECOM) that security provides ‘a form of protection where a separation is created between the assets and the threat’. Self-help methods arose out of this dire need. Vigilante shall be used interchangeably with self-help methods to signify some of these so called security methods. According to dictionary.reference.com, vigilante is any person who takes the law into his or her own hands, as by avenging a crime. Failure of governmental power in the medieval ages was precursor to feudalism; a stage which constrained weak humans to seek security recourse under an influential overlord. Increasing in intensity, this arrangement brought loss of freedom to the point of near slavery. In the medieval ages, feudalism and its attendant feudal economy of serfdom grew out of lack of confidence in the central authority of the great empire of the Franks which was divided into three and corresponding to the modern states of France, Germany and Italy and its resultant insecurity which made people to pledge their much cherished land to a baron in lieu of the protection of their lives. The Barbary Docks, the Vikings, Norsemen and the Danes who terrorized the people and pushed them to mortgaging their treasure promoted another social evil which was growth of serfdom and an unending environment of feud between the mutually competing feudal lords. This take off point is as important as it explains the growing spate of private security outfit in the face of obvious failure of a central government empowered to ensure security of life and property.

Nigeria’s Growing State of Insecurity

Security is fundamental to governmental existence. In the history of the empires that rose to greatness and suffered eventual decline, insecurity was usually a precursor to other factors that predisposed the empires to both decline and eventual collapse. Usually seen as a crack within an internal order, it is this that causes weakness

which exposes the state to external interference or attack. Insecurity in itself, historically speaking germinates on the fertile soil of governmental lapse, indiscipline, luxurious and lackadaisical life, insensitivity encapsulated in impunity-ridden corruption. Governmental display of impunity encourages recklessness and makes government limp in tackling anything that bothers on impunity such as open daylight robbery, terrorism, arms and drug dealing and racketeering, kidnapping and other societal vices that threaten man's sane existence. Taking a cue from history, it is apt to understand that unchecked sign of gross indiscipline is a warning sign of governmental tolerance and even acceptance of insecurity.

The major threat to Nigerian security was the outbreak of the civil war. The war in itself was attributed to many factors one of which was corruption. Corruption had caused much socio-political and economic disparity causing workers to be so much 'aggrieved by low wages and bad conditions especially when they compared their lot to the lifestyle of the politicians in Lagos'. Sequel to this 'workers embarked on strikes which included people from all ethnic groups' (Diamond in Wikipedia)

This public discontentment gave vent to a military regime which usurped power from the elected Prime Minister in a coup de tat. A civil war erupted and equipped the military on both sides with arms. This proliferation deepened the security condition of Nigeria as arms entered into the hands of many and sundry. The end of the war did not mean a return of normalcy in societal life. Numerous armaments which have found their way into society became a problem in the hands of criminally minded war survivors who used these weapons to unleash heinous acts. The aftermath of the war with its generic poverty promoted indulgence in crime and exhibition of ruthless power because of availability of guns. It is clear that the end of the war brought in so much social, economic and political problems, all of which were impediment to the security of the nation. The unleashed monster of arms proliferation for instance, resulted in sophisticated crime where stealing became replaced by armed robbery.

The Oil Economy and the Oil Loot

The oil economy gave rise to oil loot. This crime, now whitewashed as fraud gave vent to rape of national treasury and diversion of same into private individual or corporate purses. The fact of living in the same economic environment (the looters and the looted), tempting as it is volatile, especially in a highly eroded culture where hard-work could be misconstrued for weakness or even foolishness, triggered justification for violence and all round insecurity. The degree of structural imbalance is theoretically in agreement with the social movement of Ajayi and Adefolaju (2013) reported that political marginalization and economic deprivation created conditions for restiveness and agitations. Crime became commonplace and quite hopeless as the governmental paraphernalia charged with security faced both the challenge of the sophistry of crime

wave as well as the injustice of the entire Nigerian environment which created such a gap. Nigeria's desire to general security and wellbeing became highly illusive.

The Death of Hard Work

Sequel to get-rich-quick was the death of the desire for honesty and hard work. Might increasingly became right and there was apparently no reason for working to earn a reward. The gap has been so widened and those who by whatever means became rich, got the accolades and respect hitherto reserved for diligence and honesty. Marginalization of the poor became the death nail on the coffin of hard-work.

Widespread Insecurity across the Nation

Insecurity heightened astronomically. Two sets of humans existed; those who would not indulge in crime and those who would. Whatever be the case, it was obvious that all and sundry needed security. The looters and the criminals on one side as well as the rest who struggle for honest living are all in need of a convenient environment to enjoy or exist. While the top, successful criminals operate with thugs and create their own security environment, most times with governmental protection, they also are part of the communal arrangement which the average human seeking security subscribes to. The common man who has not ascended the ladder of riches by fair or foul means remains vulnerable in this security pursuit arrangement. Doling out of money remains the underlying reason for recognition and application of whatever treatment anyone received. Personal security became as recognized as vigilante in whatever forms. Recruitment into such watchdog jobs was not spelt out and to a large extent was not a guarantee of altruism or freedom from crime. On the contrary, most times, it was based on the ability to indulge in horror such as gun-letting, beheading and terror stricken behaviours. Fractionalization became a constant feature of this vague and risky security arrangement.

Insecurity as a bedfellow of Nigerian politics had unleashed ethnic rivalry and religious bigotry. It had become common to see the various segments of the nation as vigilante, seemingly protecting their own people while in actuality it was a divisive arrangement spurred by intense sentiments and self-seeking ambitions. This state of affairs got heightened by the 'do or die' ambition of Nigerian politicians who tirelessly go back to exacerbate ethnicity - the easily available platform of unwary followership. The Oodua Peoples' Congress of the Yoruba 'elite' was founded by Faseun (1994) as a militant arm of Afenifere (Okechukwu, 2003,). In 1999 for instance, another faction led by Ganiyu Adams emerged. These groups have remained mutually antagonistic and could only be of lip service in the claim of fostering the Yoruba interest. In the North, Arewa Peoples' Congress was formed perhaps to present a formidable front against Oodua. The Igbo People's Congress, a military arm of the Ohaneze Eastern Mandate

was also formed in response to Oodua (Onimajesin: 2007; 284). Added to these major ones are the Bakassi Boys.

Bakassi Boys, a vigilante outfit set up by Abia and Anambra State governments to curb criminal activities in 1999, the Egbesu Boys formed in 1998, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB, 2000), Tiv Militia-2001, Jukun Militia-2001, Ijaw Militia-1999, Itsekiri militia-1999, and the militia arm of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People MOSOP; -1992 (Onimajesin, 2007). Citing Agbaje (2002), Onimajesin maintained that the activities of the groups have assumed a dysfunctional dimension and threatened the objectives of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. In trying to diplomatically maintain a middle way stance, Oyvind (2009) concluded his analysis by stating that

ethnic militias have had, and still have an effect on the consolidation of democracy by holding the state responsible for its actions, and by punishing the state when it does not act according to its people's wishes. It can be claimed that they forced out democracy by highlighting the flaws of the Nigerian state even if the way they operated, was not democratic.

One then queries quite objectively if it was possible to give what one does not have. It is not an overstatement to state that the various ethnic militias who none-the-less wear the label of peace makers are actual antagonists of peace because of the parochial interest they represent. The embroiled atmosphere that is suffused with numerous armed gangs is anathema to progress. An atmosphere of horrific display of guns and crude force of violence cannot appeal to business attraction. Ethnic militias are a main source of criminality in Nigeria (Onimajesin, 2007).

The relationship between the return to democracy in 1999 and sporadic emergence of ethnic militia 'as well as separatist groups' who were used by politicians to advance their personal and at best sectional interest is clear (Akinwumi, 2005). 'Armies of jobless youths' were sustained by the politicians under the pretext of advancing the progress of their section. Recounting the chronology and proliferation of ethnic militias, Akinboye (2001) observed the high frequency of 'crises and the activities of ethnic militias'. Identifying this rampancy with return to democracy, he declared that 'ethnic militia groups and their activities are more pronounced under the present democratic rule. This might not be unconnected with the relative liberal environment created by democracy.' He continued with the documentation of mayhem of these militia groups:

On 31st May, 1999, Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri militias engaged in violent clash in Warri town Delta State. The violent conflict erupted over the Olu of Warri throne and recognition. 17th July, 1999, ethnic

clash involving members of the OPC and members of Hausa Community in Shagamu, Ogun State, as a result of the death of a Hausa woman who was said to have flouted the order restricting women from coming out of their homes during specific hours of the night during the annual Oro Festival. It led to the death of about 50 people while reprisal attacks in Kano on 22nd July, 1999 claimed over 100 lives (The News, 31, January 2000).

The Nigerian State and the Threat to Existence: Growth of Self-help Methods

Cases of different types of crimes and threat to life and property abound in today's Nigeria. Acid bathing, maiming of all kinds, snatching of cars and goods of value, street and highway waylaying by armed robbers, arson and brigandage, house-breaking, assassination, kidnapping and all sorts of crimes are common in Nigeria. The police are always reported to appear few minutes late to scenes of points of criminal assault on persons. In actuality, complicity of police and some other law enforcement agents to crime is a serious allegation. Presenting this with utmost caution FAS Intelligence Report Programme remarked regrettably that 'law enforcement authorities usually respond to crimes slowly, if at all, and provide little or no investigate support to victims. In the whirlwind situation of incessant crimes, accentuated by lack of confidence and even suspicion of the law enforcement agents, the only alternative solution seems to be self-help method. In the various ways crime manifests in the Nigerian society, commensurate self-help method has also arisen. It is clear from the way it springs up to address a particular group's security and in view of the fact that humans belong to many social groups, there is overlapping of engagement of self-help group by persons. The snag, however, lies that the loyalty of the vigilante is primarily to the person who engaged their services. In this parochialism, loyalty could mean disloyalty and in the face of irrationality, additional expression of allegiance might endanger others who are outside the interest of the prime employer. The extension of the services of the self-help groups most times extends to settlement of disputes. The inclusion of both scientific and unscientific methods of resolution of conflicts and detection of crimes impose harsh inescapable and inexplicable laws upon humans.

Vigilante/Self Help in Villages

The village self-help method seem to be indigenous in the Igbo-speaking states of Nigeria where the village democracies took well defined steps to apportion roles and ensure the smooth running of the villages. Security was paramount in the Igbo traditional society and certain age grades, young and strong, were considered suitable for the service. This they undertook as part of the developmental stride they contributed to which remuneration was given according to the will of the people. It was not paid for as the pool that rendered the watchdog service had their gainful employment elsewhere. This is driven by altruism but quite in contrast with the upsurge of vigilante

in present times. The villages now float vigilante services which are swelled up by youths who undertake the job as full time employment. From their recruitment to their mode of operation, it is instructive that their inclination will be to their boss, who could have his whims and caprices. Governmental approval and backing of the vigilante existence in villages has not only orchestrated governmental failure but also heightened the impetus and bravado with which the vigilante operates.

Vigilante/Self Help in Cities

In the streets of cities and enclaves of estates, vigilante is floated for the protection of humans. Road blocks as well as gates are erected to provide check points for security checks. The gates in some of these places have a closing and opening time, thereby providing restriction of movements. Collection of money and bending of rules characterize the works of these security people, especially as it applies to strangers. It follows that where money was not forthcoming, manhandling of persons could result, in view of the fact that the power to adjudicate lies with the security.

Vigilante/Self-Help in the Markets

The markets have their self-help security too. The object of this institution is to provide safety for commercial activities. It however transcends this. Settlement of disputes is also undertaken by the self-help. This has many a time been used as tool for vendetta. Settlement of scores marked by violence and reprisals are very common among the vigilante. This multiplicity of roles is as empowering to the vigilante as it is disadvantageous to the people they serve.

Security outfit of corporate entities such as banks, schools, churches and so on

The existence of corporate entities is synonymous with the existence of security outfits today. It is assumed today that the establishment of any business concern commences with the floating of a security outfit to ensure the welfare of the groups the business represents. Banks, schools, churches and individual crusade leaders avail themselves of one self-help group or the other. The flooding of vigilante groups is commonplace in today's Nigeria. The same goes for names of 'corporate' security outfits. These are essentially injurious to people outside the enclave of their avowed protection and sometimes harmful to the people they are supposedly rendering serving to. In his account based on a survey report about security firms in Nigeria, Adegboye (vanguardngr.com) listed only twelve security companies as having 'a clean bill of health after a tour of the nation in the wake of recent security challenges nationwide.' He regretted that 'most of the security companies operating in Nigeria currently, shockingly have assets-base of less than N350,000.00 and yet are exposed to billions of Naira projects...(and that the) quality and integrity of people working in most security outfits are questionable'.

Security Outfit of the Affluent

The rich employ personal security guards to watch over them. These range from a few armed persons, mainly men to a retinue of them. They could move in a convoy of a fleet of very expensive vehicles. Sometimes, the security outfit could be an inter-mix of governmental agency and personally built vigilante. It has grown trendy for the affluent to have personal vigilante who oversees their welfare. The intimidating presence of such security outfit could easily frighten the innocent out of their skin. Deaths and injuries in the hands of the ruthlessness of these 'guards' are common and mainly unrecorded and unaccounted for. Their reckless display is usually in symphony with the cruelty of the weapon they carry and the wanton display of affluence of their employers. The mentality of 'money is everything' pervade the dramatic presence of these employers and employees; all enwrapped in unrivalled arrogance. This at best is crude insecurity.

Vigilante/Self Help at Ceremonies

It has become culture to hold events and ceremonies under vigilante surveillance. The characteristic Nigeria's social milieu is bloated with vigilante/self-help presence. It seems out of place to hold events presently in Nigeria without engaging the services of the vigilante. Ad hoc vigilante could also be floated because of financial capability. Arms for vigilante services range from sophisticated rifles to bows and arrows as the case may be. The underlying factor is the undaunted bravery to protect the employer, instil fear on any perceived threat and deal ruthlessly with any suspected opposition.

There is a general knowledge that the vigilante soak themselves in intoxicants to enable them be bold and fearless. Among the items they indulge in are alcohol and drug. This intoxicant induced boldness at best, yields gross irrationality critically averse to security.

Governmental Presence and Vigilante Growth

Tolerance of self-help methods/vigilante and its eventual recognition have complicated vigilante existence. The reason for self-help upsurge is governmental failure. This failure is embedded in systemic corruption in governance which has resulted in unemployment, hunger and starvation and extreme hardship. It is in line with this that Nigeria's over 100 million people live below poverty line (Osibanjo, 2015). In this stage of hopelessness, crime is common. Shamelessness in corruption has also disdained hard-work, made a ridicule of it to the extent of loss of moral value. This state of scorn for the noble and resounding noise for riches (however it comes about) unleashed crime wave which even the law enforcement agencies in Nigeria allegedly do not escape culpability. It is in the face of this governmental failure and threat to life which government has exhibited gross incompetence to, that spurred self-

help methods. It is an aberration for government to shamelessly endorse the vigilante and work as its moderator or coadjutor. Governmental backing is an enrichment of the vigilante which in the spirit of loyalty to the master could become a weapon of lethality on opponents of government. This is a death trap for opposition which absence will usher in dictatorship and docile followership, thereby perpetrating evil in governance. Politicians have empowered president generals of town unions in order to influence the entire paraphernalia of the town's existence. The control of the vigilante covertly or overtly is a design of extreme autocracy hidden in the nomenclature of democracy. The Bakassi in Anambra state received governmental backing and unleashed reprehensible terror on the state (Dike, 2014). The Oodua represents the same horror even in its fractionalized state. Unchecked boldness is the result of the cooperation of the government with vigilante. Evil alliance is a result of such marriage of like minds. The easy result is partnership in crime or further distancing of security. The citizens are limp in assessing these self-help methods. Sometimes in fear of being labelled the much sought after criminal, they smugly give in to its support.

Vigilante/Self-Help as Political Thugs

In the excessiveness of action due to governmental backing, vigilante presence pervades the entire Nigeria. Political thugs are commonplace and work parochially for the welfare of the affluent it serves. There is no distinction between the vigilante that protects the citizenry and that used to project governmental personal ambition. No vigilante as a matter of fact can boldly stand against the interest of the government in power and continue to exist. This marriage of convenience is against societal interest and works against the general good of the people which is what progress stands for.

Vigilante/Self-Help as a Panacea of Unemployment

In the face of monumental unemployment and poverty crunch (as there is complete absence of welfare schemes to cushion hardship in Nigeria), vigilante is readily seen as an answer to the problem of youth idleness. This has given vigilante smug acceptance in the face of the negative aspects it projects. To determine whether it is a less evil or a worse one than unemployment depends on a number of factors some of which are: being above or below poverty line; the analytical extent of the individual in terms of ultimate good or bad; personal experiences and the psyche of vendetta which at best could be described as blind anger; the personal gain that accrues to the individual and so on. All in all, vigilante and its wide spread even in the churches has weakened the reason of conscience which border on the victimization of the innocent, jungle justice, horrific display of bloodletting and so on.

Results of Self-help Upsurge

Self-help security has added to the spate of insecurity in Nigeria. The reason is the multiple layers of vigilante groups that exist. Their primary loyalty is the welfare

of the master/humans that engaged them. Opponents and rivals could use vigilante affiliation to extend conflicts or exacerbate problems which might affect even those outside the enclave of opposition. To the rivals too, there could be unwieldy display of irrationality which is averse to the security sought. It is common to witness jungle justice with dead bodies littering the roads and most times constituting serious health hazards resulting from decomposition. Indifference and apathy is on the increase with the upsurge of these self-seeking methods. Unfeeling attitude is on the increase and has yielded to a decline of conscience. The immediate result manifested as follows:

Growth of Impunity

Vigilante use of arms is an extension of the bravado which they ordinarily display as they are meant to be men of untold bravery. Backed by their employees and armed with guns, vigilante action can be as intimidating as it can be damaging and fatal. Self-help methods and impunity are strong bedfellows. The short span of application of justice characteristic of this method is impunity represented. Impunity becomes monumental and flourishes under the platform of defying logical reasoning, common sense, good human relationship and other noble consideration. Might is displayed as right and humans are subjected to excruciating pain. This is insecurity unchecked.

Flight from Areas of High Risk Such As Port Harcourt, Onitsha etc.

Ethnic militia which is a feature of self-help (for whatever reason they are constituted) has generated a trend of terror and insecurity, resulting in flight of humans in areas of its prevalence. The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta, Oodua People's Forum, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, Arewa Consultative Forum have in one way or the other made acute the insecurity problem. The result is flight from some areas of intensive insecurity such as Port Harcourt, Onitsha and so on to areas of relative non-ethnicity such as Abuja. The result of such security-induced movements is averse to economic and social development of the nation.

Growth of Injustice/ Deepening of Tribalism, Ethnic rivalry, Religious Bigotry/Intolerance.

Injustice is distant from the vigilante ridden society. Cases are tried within very short period and excruciating ways of extracting information is common. Suspects are more of culprits even before culpability is ascertained. They are subjected to extreme torture in the course of questioning. The degree of insecurity that results is better imagined than witnessed.

Dichotomies abound in self-help common environments. From tribal, ethnic, to religious, intolerance of one another is bred. The depth of these rancorous traits is

evident in the frequency of bloodletting, arson, brigandage and overall threat to life and property. Freedom of persons is fettered with fear and in this, rampant and open brazen hostility. Media reports abound with countless cases of these.

Total Lack of Discipline/ Subjugation of Truth and Living in Fear

Indiscipline has been misconstrued for wisdom. Circumventing procedures are common regardless of whose toes are being stepped upon. This situation has gained accommodation and even acceptance. Discipline is speedily being downgraded and taken for slowness, feet-dragging, laziness and lack of vision.

Abuse and wanton display of crude force is orchestrated by subjugation of truth and upturned justice. The judiciary is as distant a place to seek redress as the security agents are near as immediate recourse for insecurity. Fear takes the place of pursuit and upholding of truth. At best, people are non-committal because of subdued truth and would rather not get into trouble than disclose the truth they know, even to the point of harming the innocent. There is no protection for giving information rather for the patron of whatever security paraphernalia in charge of any occasion.

Increased Growth of Self-help methods/Erosion of Altruism and Public Spiritedness

Self-help methods characterized by selfishness and parochial pursuit of personal interests grow by the day. While some are overt, there exist a good number that operate covertly. The secret cults for instance function in the same principle of brotherhood which seeks to protect its own. These brotherhoods have found their way substantially in the citadels of learning in Nigeria and make the hope of a better Nigeria strained.

Self-seeking display of self-help security methods work against public interest and good. The extent it erroneously appears good is to the seeming interest of the so called protected. Sometimes, the so called protected gets hurt mistakenly in the characteristic way of hasty judgments and brazen impunity. Self-help is not in conformity with altruism and public spiritedness. It could portend to be but in actuality is not by virtue of its formation and orientation as mercenaries of their patrons. This is different from the age long communal effort that thrives on volunteer service in public interest.

Retrogression and Imminent Collapse of Economic and Social Structures

Economic growth thrives on safe environment. This is far-fetched in an insecure environment. A rock-chair economic growth is the outcome of a place of insecurity. Security is apparent in a vigilante-ridden society. Such apparent safety could at best attract short life span economic activity which reverses with the obvious truth of insecurity situation. In overall estimate, the outcome is economic decline.

All indices for growth are intricately related. A good economy will enshrine healthy social structures and conversely an unhealthy one if the economy is bad. Education, infrastructure, culture, international relations, governmental existence and so on are adversely affected when the economy is poor. These singly and collectively suffer on the strain of insecurity which cannot be checked by multiplicity of self-help methods.

Recommendations

- Governmental presence should address insecurity with the following steps.
- Good leadership.
- Intolerance of corruption at all levels of society.
- Promotion and reward of hard work.
- Rule of law in all its ramifications/equality before the law.
- Provision of altruistic security paraphernalia by the government.
- Security outfit should not be the errand boy of the government in power.
- Vigilante groups should only exist to assist governmental security. This is possible where vigilante acts as neighbourhood watch in the places where they know and understand well. For instance in the village where life is an open book; everybody knows the other and a lot of information can be got to assist the government security personnel in its work.
- Elective positions should stand clearly as a call to service through slashing of the omnibus packages which attract the do or die attitude to get into power. It is this craze that makes politicians to float thugs in order to get in power and ultimately increase vigilante upsurge.

Conclusion

The need to reduce insecurity is urgent. A secure environment is attractive to growth and development in all its ramifications. Vigilante upsurge cannot assuage this need. Rather, it creates a parochial milieu of apparent security which is averse to all round development. The closeness presented by proliferation of self-help methods contradicts the definition of security which provides for a separation between assets and threats (ISECOM). Socio-economic and political progress will thrive on the fertile ground of rational, governmentally secure arrangement which hinges on the honesty and forthrightness of the government toward the ultimate good of its citizenry. Away from this, apparent and temporary respite is got with the vigilante upsurge. This is unhealthy as much as it is in opposition to real development which is targeted.

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