

CONTAINING WEST AFRICAN INSECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE NIGERIAN QUAGMIRE

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ABSTRACT

Since the new millennium, the West African security situation has witnessed different political violence and emerging new threats to the region's peace and stability far from the post-independence era that was characterized by five full-scale intrastate wars (Souaré, 2010.) These new threats such as deep-rooted electoral violence, drug cum human trafficking and the most Herculean, of course, violent extremism among several others pose a clog in the wheels of development in sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the ability to contain if not to drastically reduce the security challenges has become a quagmire for Nigeria, who is being looked up to, to provide the needed leadership in the region (Fawole, 2000). It is so because Nigeria represents approximately 70% of the 15-country ECOWAS GDP and more than half of the ECOWAS region's population (ITA: 2023). This paper examined Nigeria's domestic and regional security challenges, thereby, discovered the impeding factors in containing the West African security, as the regional hegemon. The recommendation is that for Nigeria to contain the region effectively, it has to build and prove to possess the enablement to its neighbour-states by succeeding in resolving its internal security problems. Charity begins at home.

Keywords: West African security, Nigeria, regional peace, Security challenges

INTRODUCTION

The security situation of the West African sub-region in the 21st Century is characterized by what many political analysts termed as

emerging” new threats,” though, some are not actually new. This is different from Africa’s post-Independence era that was enmeshed with 5 full-scale intrastate wars. These new threats such as military coup d’etat or unconstitutional change of power, election-related violence, drug *cum* human trafficking and the most Herculean, of course, violent extremism among several others pose a clog in the wheels of West Africa’s development and stability.



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At: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/txu-oclc-238859671-africa_pol_2008.jpg

Geographically, West Africa is the 5 million square mile area located in the westernmost region of the African continent (<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org>). It has an important international organization, the Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS), founded in 1975 and headquartered in Nigeria as the biggest financier. The population of West Africa stands at about 391,026,791 people who represent nearly 29% of the total population on the continent (UNOWAS report, 2020.)

However, the West African geo-strategic events in the 21st century, say aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks in US, 2001 and later the collapse of Gadaffi's Libyan state in 2011, have brought about the dynamics of these new threats.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework of the study is anchored on securitization theory which explains that national or regional security is not given but carefully designated by the concerned politicians. These politicians have to agree to any political issue like immigration to be of an extreme security issue when they see it as “threatening,” which needs to be dealt with urgently beyond politics (Eroukhanoff, 2017). In this case, the new threats which West African states have come to see as common security challenges that need to be nipped in the bud in securing the region. For Nigeria, it hinges the principle of “Responsibility to Protect” upon itself as the regional hegemon to safeguard the regional security. More to that were the strategic realities of its Civil War that exposed its fragile territorial integrity which has precipitated it to re-conceptualise its national security to include its neighbours (Fawole, 2003). That is to say, the security and safety of West Africa is tantamount to Nigeria's national security. It is on this backdrop that ECOWAS's ECOMOG was spearheaded by Nigeria in various peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and recently, Mali to restore and foster peace and security in the sub-region. These, therefore, induce Nigeria's foreign policy formulators to see the need, not only to be steadfastly involved in policies aimed at maintaining peace and tranquility on the African continent in general, but in the West African sub-region in particular.

The West Africa's Security challenges in the 21st Century

In West Africa, there are some common security challenges bedeviling the sub-region which require concerted efforts in

addressing them for collective peace and stability. The most strategic among them is extreme insurgency.

Extremist insurgency is the most important security nut for the West African states to crack. The epicenters of this extremism are in the central Sahel in the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Lake Chad Basin sub-regions. Historically, the instability created by the insurgency is traced to the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, which led to the proliferation of weapons and armed fighters in the region. The researcher observes that the Islamist insurgency gains potency and relevance by the connivances of political leaders and factional groups in the affected states. For instance, in 2012, Tuareg rebellion under the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNL) in northern Mali sought the assistance of the extremists (including al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb-AQIM, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa -MUJAO and Ansar Dine) for autonomous state. In September 2016, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) surfaced in Burkina Faso, launching its first major attack on a border post near the Burkinabe city of Markoye (Center for Preventive Action, 2023.) In the Lake Chad Basin region, the Islamist extremism gruesomely intersects Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria with the emergence of Boko Haram in northeast zone.) In the 50 Worst Terrorist Attacks in 2022, 31 were in West Africa, according to Global Terrorism Index 2023 Report. In Nigeria alone, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reveals that Boko Haram insurgency had claimed nearly 350,000 lives as of the end of 2020 (Reuters, 2021.) In the sub-region, Nigeria has the highest violence containment expenditure, having spent \$137 billion since 2007 (Center for Preventive Action, 2013.)

Military coups and unconstitutional changes of government are a renewed political violence in West African region. One would

assume that the forceful political transitions that characterized the post-European colonialist system had passed the test of time. More so, after the failure of neoliberal democratic project embraced by African leaders that would have freed the continent from military takeover of power, the region, between 2019 and 2022, had witnessed 4 successful military coup d'état on one hand and 2 failed ones on another hand (Suleiman and Onapajo, 2022.)

Table: Coups in West Africa and the Sahel since 2019

| Country | Coup date | Type of coup | Leader/s | Targeted gov't |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Guinea-Bissau | February 1, 2022 | Failed | Unclear | Pres. Umaro Embaló |
| Burkina Faso | January 24, 2022 | Successful | Lt-Col Paul-Henri Damiba | Pres. Roch Kaboré |
| Guinea | September 5, 2021 | Successful | Col. Mamady Doumbouya | Pres. Alpha Conde |
| Niger | March 31, 2021 | Failed | Unclear | Pres-Elect Mohamed Bazoum |
| Mali | May 24, 2021 | Successful | Assimi Goita | Pres. Bah Ndaw |
| Mali | August 19, 2020 | Successful | Assimi Goita | Pres. Ibrahim Keita |

Source: Compilation by Muhammad Dan Suleiman and Hakeem Onapajo • Created with Datawrapper

These coups have been adjudged to have been caused by internal and external factors. The internal are those that materialize from bad government and not meeting the yearnings of their citizenry; while the external culled from the global dynamics of external influences and impact of insecurity on the continent. This security issue gives attention to the next security challenge.

Border conflicts are typical to West African states. These are caused by resolvable border disputes which have been a regular feature of state interactions in West Africa, though, none had degenerated into war. Moreso, the political violence that takes place in the borderlands, at the shortest time, spills over to borderlines of the neighbouring states due to porous nature of

borders in the region, thereby, causing transnational security concerns. For example, a decade ago, Islamist insurgents did exploit this weakness to carry out a number of attacks that are essentially staged and launched from neighbouring countries (Radil, Irmischer and Walther, 2021). Similarly, in early October 2017, a set of fighting miscreants connived with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) crossed the Nigerien border and attacked a military patrol on duty outside the village of Tongo Tongo, in the Liptako Gourma, leaving 5 Nigerien and 4 American soldiers dead while several others severely wounded before returning to Mali afterwards (<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org>). Despite several collective military operations to arrest the activities of these fomenters, West African governments have not found lasting resolutions to the causes of these border conflicts. West Africa is experiencing climate change at rates faster than the global average.

The climate change in West Africa is higher than the global average. The countries in the Sahel region of the West African are more heated from the resultant of weather change –namely Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Mauritania (Sagna, 2021.) The World Bank has identified rising sea levels and coastal erosion across the region as major risks to life and property. (Ikoku, 2022), affirms that “droughts are becoming more intense with temperatures rising 1.5 times faster than in the rest of the world. Likewise, Lake Chad, the region’s main freshwater lake responsible for the sustenance of humans and animals, has shrunk by over 90 per cent since the 80s.” As a result of this, the Sahelian belt has been notorious as a hotspot for herders/farmers conflict over land and water resources. Needless to mention that Nigeria could not be left out from insecurity caused by the climate change as farmlands and human lives have been lost to floods especially in 2022 raining season.



Election violence has always been characterized with the crises ranging from widespread coercive intimidation of voters, carting away of electoral materials and public unrest by aggrieved parties usually the oppositions who feel their political interests have been short-changed by the incumbents before or after the elections. This scenario succinctly depicts what is common in West African society. In the past few years, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia have had repeated history of very violent elections. The climax of them were the coup d'états staged during and prior to the elections in both Guinea Bissau and Mali in April 2012. The commonplace was the low-intensity violence witnessed in countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal (Adolfo, 2012.)

Migration in West Africa is estimated to be 7.6 million international migrants resided in the sub-region as of mid-year 2020 (UN DESA, 2020). Assumably, five out of eight migrants from Western Africa continue to stay within the region. Cote D'Ivoire, Nigeria and Burkina Faso are the destination states of migrants in West Africa in that order (www.migrationdataportal.org). However, there is an increased movement of nomadic cattle headers across borders southward to the Green coastal vegetable land in search of pasture which is called transhumance. This has led to the trespassing across the farmlands of the host countries with impunity which has caused pastoralist violence in a number of times. In 2022, West Africa had experienced high movements within the region resultant by the military coups d'état in Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso and the attempted coup in Guinea-Bissau (ICMPD Migration Outlook 2022.) Despite the framework of ECOWAS' Common Approach on Migration to better manage its immigrant stock, it is self-defeated by its application of ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and the Rights of Residence and Establishment (Ouedraogo, 2009.)



Drug and human trafficking constitute significant challenges to the security of West Africa. The region has been transformed into a hub for transit, with a considerable proportion of cocaine trafficking and the orchestrated movements of individuals facilitated by the porous borders of the West African maritime borderlands. It is unfortunate that government officials are complicit in supporting these criminal activities. Such trafficking activities not only contribute to other trans-border crimes, including money-laundering, illegal migration, and smuggling, but also pose a serious threat to the legitimate economic development of the region.

Arms-smuggling/proliferation of light weapons has had a significant impact on the West African region, particularly the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). These SALWs have exacerbated conflicts, escalated rates of violence, and contributed to the destruction of lives and property in areas of conflict. Furthermore, they have enabled the emergence of militant, bandit, and rebel groups, which have disrupted economic infrastructure and created an environment of insecurity. The illegal spread of SALWs in West Africa is driven by factors such as weak physical security, porous borders, and corruption in stockpile management. Nigeria, in particular, has experienced a notable increase in SALW proliferation, with a significant proportion of the West African sub-region's SALWs in the hands of non-state actors. The proliferation of SALWs in Africa, and West Africa specifically, has also been linked to insurgency, militancy, and criminal activities, posing a threat to both stability and development.

Maritime piracy within the West African region has substantial ramifications. The Gulf of Guinea has experienced a growth in security threats as a result of piracy, which endanger both security and the economy (Denton, 2019.) The West African piracy has displayed diversity, efficacy, and peril. Attacks often occur near



the shore, coinciding with regions of high ship density (Liwang, 2017.) The motive for attacks varies, with theft typically transpiring near the shore at night and more intricate attacks on ships in motion occurring during the daytime and further from the shore. Effective measures for combating piracy involve detecting the attack and implementing a sequence of strategies, as no single strategy can adequately safeguard a vessel given the operational conditions within West Africa (Ofosu-Boateng.)

However, the growing insecurity in West Africa continues to have adverse effects on Nigeria. One of them is its leadership question in the region. Its leading role in fostering ECOWAS's economic integration and security is, expectedly, being impeded by its own internal security challenges.

The Internal Security Challenges: A Quagmire for Nigeria

In furtherance to pursue its Afro-centric foreign policy by providing security for ECOWAS sub-region, as a "Big Brother," Nigeria is challenged by a number of its internal security problems. This study, inexhaustibly, x-rays them one after the other to uncover the reasons among which are political gains behind the inability to tackle these "emerging new threats" all round.

Islamist insurgency in Nigeria, arguably, appears to have been initiated by cleric Muhammed Yusuf in northeastern Nigeria in 2002 when he preached the creation of an Islamic state and Western-style education. He was killed alongside his over seven hundred Boko Haram members in 2009 by police forces. The group went underground but later adopted guerrilla operations with suicide bombings on police and the UN headquarters in Abuja, in 2011. The group attained global notoriety subsequent to its abduction of 276 girls hailing from the town of Chibok, located in Borno State. This event gave rise to the worldwide "Bring Back Our Girls movement" in April of 2014. In 2015, the group pledged its allegiance to the



self-proclaimed Islamic State and subsequently underwent a rebranding as the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP). A faction divided from the original Boko Haram was operational until the year 2021, at which point ISWAP eliminated its commander, absorbed its territory, and banished its members to secluded islands situated in Lake Chad (Center for Preventive Action, 2023). In the foregoing, the Global Terrorism Index (2019) report shows that Nigeria's terrorism index rose from 36th to 3rd from 2002 to 2018, with total recorded deaths of 22, 415 and more than 3.4 million civilians across the region displaced.

Banditry in Nigeria is a result of various factors such as; poor forest governance, deteriorating socio-economic conditions, violence, and poor governance. These factors have contributed to the rise of criminal groups like the "Kwanta-Kwanta" group who have created their own governance structures under the tents of ungoverned spaces, leading to an increase in cattle rustling and other criminal activities in order to survive. This exacerbates the security challenges in the country, particularly in the northwest and north-central regions (Onwuzuruigbo, 2021.)

Ungoverned spaces in Nigeria are primarily found in the northern region, specifically in the forests of northern Nigeria. For example, the Borno State in Nigeria has areas attributed to ungoverned spaces, particularly in the southern and central parts where Sambisa forest is located in the state. These ungoverned spaces have been exploited by criminal groups and terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram. Efforts to address the challenges posed by these ungoverned spaces have included the use of technology-driven approaches, such as drones, to manage and monitor these areas (Ojo, 2020.)

Fulani-herder invasions in Nigeria have been a recurring issue, leading to conflicts and violence between herders and local

farmers. Why? Government lacks the political morale to resolve the lingered issue allayed the favour of playing to the gallery. These invasions are often driven by desperate migration in search for grazing fields. The increase in the influx of migrating herders, exacerbated by ecological changes and climate-induced constrictions, has further intensified the conflicts, (Igwebuike, 2021.) A set of Fulani herdsmen that the United Nations had, recently, blacklisted as a terrorist group. In the first half of 2018 alone, not less than 1,300 Nigerians had been killed, (International Crisis group, 2018.) These conflicts in form of rape of aged women, destruction of farmlands and the killing of members of the host communities by the wicked Fulani herdsmen in places like Taraba, Benue, Enugu and Oyo state among others. There have been counter accusations by different interest groups for the responsibility and prosecutions of these heinous acts. The South-West cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria had said the allegation that Fulani herdsmen were killing farmers was politically motivated, saying its members were not guilty of any crime. Meanwhile, The Nigerian Concord News reported in August 31, 2022, that the Benue State governor, Chief Samuel Ortom had accused the federal government under President Muhammadu Buhari of funding, and shielding Fulani herdsmen. The fact remains that government has not brought any offender to book, therefore, explains the government's responses to be inadequate and politicized which embolden the herdsmen to intensify in their criminal activities.

Ethnic and religious clashes in Nigeria are caused by a combination of factors. One major factor is the struggle over value and competition for scarce resources and political powers with the aims of opponents to outsmart their rivals. Others are inflammatory jabs/hate-speeches passed online, bigotry or inciting statements by religious leaders that could trigger conflicts, the use of religion and ethnicity in political discourse by desperate politicians usually during election periods. These clashes have led to massive loss of



lives, destruction of property, economic decline and red flag for business investors especially in the northern region. For instance, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000; the Bauchi and Jos riots in 2001, respectively, which both had claimed hundreds of lives (Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, 2021.)

Kidnapping in Nigeria is cut across the country's six geo-political zones. The selfish politicians, family members, business associates, Fulani-Islamist terrorists, bandits and militants, in one way or the other, ambush their victims to unknown destinations varying for political and economic gains. In any case, victims are psychologically traumatized while some are killed by their captors before the government's rescue team could swing to actions. Few reports have it that some are rescued alive with ransoms paid by government itself or victims' relatives. For example, Intersociety, an International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, revealed that Dr Franklyn Ezeonwuka with his female colleague of the Spiritan University, Nneochi, Abia State were, on 15th June, 2022, double-crossed before they were abducted along Isuochi expressway in Umunneochi Local Government of Abia State by some Fulani Jihadists who were heavily armed with AK47 rifles. They were held inside the bush for 2 days under terrible inhuman conditions. Alas, Ezeonwuka's Amesi kinsmen had to rally round to raise N20million that was paid as ransom before they were freed by the captors (Leadership, 2022.) This is just one out of many cases.

Election-related violence is peculiar to every electoral period in Nigeria since 2003. Supposedly, elections are usually activities of electing public servants in a democracy which serve the purpose of peaceful transition of one government to another, (Ashindorbe, 2018). In a plural society like Nigeria, it is usually easy for the factional political leaders to divide Nigerians across ethno-religious and regional lines through their hate-speeches or inciting statements on the campaign trains that, at the end of the day, resulting the political thugs,



during electoral process, to harass, maim and even kill registered voters with impunity without the police prosecuting the perpetrators. The February 25th Presidential Election held in 2023, succinctly, captures the story. (See The European Election Observation Mission -Nigeria 2023 Final Report.)

Armed robbery is as old as Nigeria itself, (Neusroom, 2021). Though, its frequent incidents make it a serious security issue resulting, largely, from unemployment among the youths (Otu, 2010). Armed robbery operations span homes, shops, commercial banks and even on the highways to the point that no place is safe from attacks mainly by these specialized skilled men (Abanyam et al., 2013.) Any person convicted for robbery would be sentenced to imprisonment for not less than 21 years, (See Section 402. of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria): the punishment has not deterred or prevented the crime.

Cyber-frauds and Ponzi scams/Financial crimes have been fancied by Nigerian youths including secondary school students. The ubiquity of the smart phones *cum* internet which is complex, fragmented and vulnerable to the victims of internet scammers, otherwise known as Yahoo-Yahoo boys, has made it easy for idle unemployed youths to enlist themselves into “internet business”. Reportedly, *Nigeria* loses about N127 billion yearly to internet frauds (<https://www.thisdaylive.com>, 2022). According to The Guardian Newspaper dated August 3, 2022, cybercrimes had recorded a massive rise in the first six months of 2022. While over 2,800 persons were convicted in 2022 for cybercrimes by EFCC, ironically, the Cybercrime Act enacted by the National Assembly in 2015 has not made the internet safer for Nigerians.

Niger Deltan militancy is the restive activities by the youths in the region for resource control. It is a recurrent problem that has had negative impacts on the area's economic and developmental progress. The root causes of the militancy can be attributed to

frustration borne out of unemployment and deprivation resulting from the politics of oil exploitation and uneven distribution of oil wealth (Inyang, 2018.) The youth in the region, who are disproportionately affected have formed armed groups (such as Movement for the survival of Ogoni People –MOSOP) to seek redress against both the government and Multinational Corporations. The resurgence of militancy, especially in Bayelsa and Delta States, has led to a decline in crude oil production, contributing to Nigeria's economic downturn. The region has been beset by violence and conflict, with small and medium-sized enterprises bearing the brunt of the negative impact. (Onuoha, 2021), posits that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has further aggravated the militancy and insurgency in the area, draining Nigeria of its financial, material, and military resources. The late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua established, in 2009, the *Niger Delta Amnesty Program* (NDAP) to mitigate the conflict in the region. Despite the *whooping amount of \$40 billion* spent on the region in the last 10 years, including the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, the region is almost nothing to show for it (Daily Post Nigeria, 2018.) As at December 22, 2022, the region was still in the shadow of itself in that the government was yet to complete the Ogoni clean-up. (Premiumtimesng.com, 2022.)

Oil thefts and vandalism have emerged as significant challenges for the oil and gas industry in Nigeria. The escalating instances of oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in Nigeria have been attributed to corruption, inadequate policies, youth unemployment, and ineffective law enforcement agencies. The Niger Delta region is a prominent area where these activities occur (Boris, 2015.). Between 2010 and 2012, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) reported 2,787 pipeline disruptions, resulting in a loss of 157.81 metric tonnes of petroleum products valued at approximately N12.53 billion. A dataset comprising monthly cases of pipeline vandalism from



January 2015 to January 2021 indicates that the number of incidents varied over time, with fluctuations observed during the COVID-19 lockdown period (Onwuachi-Iheagwara, 2021.) The successful vandalization of oil pipelines in the Arepo area of Ogun State was facilitated by the collusion of security agents and influential individuals. Vandals operated mostly at night, using encoded language to disguise their activities. Other key locations include Mosimi, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Warri, and Gombe, where cases of pipeline vandalism have been recorded. Though, predictive models have been developed to evaluate the risk index influenced by vandalism, highlighting the necessity for advanced models to enhance the prediction of vandalism parameters.

IPOB-associated violence has affected the South East region's socio-economy drastically by the Mondays' sit-at-home order by a sister group, since 2021, when its supreme leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu has been detained despite the court order, on the contrary. The creation of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was in response to the perceived marginalization and suppression of the Igbo people in Nigeria. Following the Nigerian Biafran War, the Igbo people were left feeling marginalized, while their rehabilitation was suppressed by the government until the return of democracy in 1999 (Ayobola, 2019.) To advocate for self-determination and secession, IPOB emerged, alongside other pro-Biafra groups such as MASSOB. Nationalist movements were utilized to address the lingering secession agitations in the South-East region. Unfortunately, the media framed IPOB negatively, creating a biased narrative against them and blaming them for various issues. However, (Nwofe, 2019) holds that the use of inflammatory statements by IPOB exacerbated ethnic disharmony, while state repression failed to undermine their separatist movement and agenda.

Cultist attacks among the youth in Nigeria have constituted a significant challenge since nineteen ninety-nine (Umar, 2019). In

the Nigeria's tertiary institutions of learning as well as in the major cities of Awka, Port-harcourt, Lagos and Onitsha among others, there has been a high occurrence of intimidation, attacks and reprisal attacks by diverse cult groups (such as Black Axe, Buccaneer, Pyrate Confraternity, etc) that have ended in deaths competing for authority, dominance and protection(Nwaogu, 2020.) The frequency of cultist attacks and fatalities has fluctuated throughout the years, with the greatest number of assaults perpetrated in twenty eighteen and the highest number of fatalities committed in twenty seventeen. Youth unemployment and inadequate opportunities have been identified as contributory factors to the involvement of the youth in cult undertakings. It is endorsed that re-orientation and sensitization initiatives be implemented to deter the youth from indulging in anti-social conduct.

Money-rituals cases have been on the stable of every media in Nigeria. Nearly everyday would there be reported a gory account of ritual incidents of how some people were dismembered by ritualists. Non-availability of data would not disprove the menace of ritual killings across the country. The alarming rate of ritual killings in Nigeria reflects the country's state of insecurity and Nigerians' desperate attempts to make instant wealth through diabolical means. Assertively, reckless politicians have been allegedly indicted to indulge in these wicked acts for their selfish political gains. To affirm the above, excerpt from ThisdayLive Editorial accessed on 21/07/2023 reads,

“But perhaps one of the most celebrated cases was that of the Port Harcourt serial killer, Gracious David-West who reportedly lured seven young ladies with high-risk lifestyle across Lagos, Imo and Rivers State to hotels and murdered them, allegedly for rituals. Similarly, Ms Iniobong Umoren, a young graduate who was raped and murdered while



searching for a job in Uyo environs, Akwa Ibom State, not long ago, was allegedly used for ritual purposes. But the gruesome murder of a 300 Level undergraduate of Delta State University, Abraka, Elozino Ogege by a gang of four yahoo boys was horrifying. One of the criminals told the police that they took the young lady to a bush where they plucked out one of her eyes while she was still alive. “She was even crying and begging us to forgive her and let her go, but we plucked the other eye, removed her breast and heart before she died,” he said.”

Studying the pyramid of security challenges that are confronting the West African states, and that are domestic to Nigerian environment, it is safe to say that it has become a “Gulliver’s Trouble” for Nigeria. Evidently, the regional giant is faced with two sides of a debacle. The dilemma, therefore, is that Nigeria is confronted with both the regional and domestic security challenges without a strategic focus to tackle any. While it is strategically impossible to leave a side for the other, it has to face both sides head-on.

Containing the West African Security Challenges: The Way Forward

To address the security challenges facing the West African region, Nigeria has been playing some key roles in this regard either for the fact of its “responsibility to protect” or “national security to include its neighbours”. By the virtue of collective security, Nigeria is of the view that West African security can only be attained by policies of cooperation, economic integration and adoption of consensus (Ajibewa, 2007). Firstly, at the national level, Nigeria has legislated Counter-Terrorism Bill 2010 and the Anti-Money Laundering Bill 2004 which are strategies to checkmate terrorist-related resurgences. While at the sub-regional level, (Akran, 2022);



argues that Nigeria-led ECOWAS was a bit delay with its response approach to counter-terrorism in the sub-region until February 2013 when it adopted the ECOWAS counterterrorism strategy in Cote D'Ivoire. (Adigbue, 2014); points that "the principal purpose of the Declaration and Strategy is to prevent and eradicate terrorism and related criminal acts in West Africa, intending to create conditions conducive to sound economic development and ensure the well-being of all ECOWAS citizens." Following the developments, Nigeria has now mobilized ECOWAS states to check terrorism and transnational criminal activities such as banditry which are facilitated by porous borders and small arms running. For example, Nigerian Armed Forces with its counterparts from 3 West African states and Chad has participated in the Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) to secure states in Lake Chad basin from terrorists with humanitarian achievements. Similarly, Nigeria has been on the frontlines in Peace-keeping/Peace Support Operations (PSOs) in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and in the Mali intervention in 2013. All these among other strategies are Nigeria's regional mechanisms for promoting and maintaining peace and stability in West Africa.

On the global level, Nigeria's acceptance for leadership in combating terrorism in West Africa through the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) under the auspices of US' Global War on Terror (GWOT) is worthy of mention (Alli, 2012.) The challenge is that Nigeria is being perceived to have imperialist design by its neighbours despite the above "selfless sacrifices" (Akindele, 2003). Another, Nigeria is self-defeating to pride itself with "responsibility to protect" to providing the required security in West Africa, while in actual sense, it does lack the responsibility to provide same at home. It is hard to be taken seriously if charity does not start from home. (Adebayo Adedeji, 2004) is quoted as thus: "No country that is confronted with a long period of political instability, stagnation and regression, and is reputed to be one of



the most corrupt societies in the world, has a moral basis to lead others. If it tries to, it will be resisted.”

Conclusion/Recommendations

The foregoing developments have shown the challenges affecting Nigeria in providing leadership from home for containing West African security issues. These challenges ranging from corruption, tribalism to religious sympathy for criminals at the detriment of securing the state by government authorities themselves. Politicians asking Amnesty for terrorists and admittance of making monetary offerings to bandits are mere politics or avenue for corruption that has eaten deep in the social fabric of Nigeria. Therefore, proverbial prism that “you cannot give what you do not have” pictures the quagmire which Nigeria has found itself. This explains one of the difficulties for Nigerians to containing or managing their internal security challenges that have been impeding positive peace and stability in the ECOWAS region. This has been the basis why Nigeria is not enjoying the moral supports expected from its neighbour states. The only way to build the confidence of West African states, is for Nigeria to jettison politics in tackling its domestic security challenges at bay. This will translate the needed collective supports in containing security within the West African community. It is so because Nigeria cannot secure the region alone.



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