

## **An in-depth Analysis of the Challenges of National Security in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*National security is a fundamental issue that is of great concern to the Nigerian government and its citizens. It is characterized by a multitude of challenges that have posed significant threats to the safety and well-being of the country. These challenges include but are not limited to, terrorism, political instability, economic instability, and natural disasters. The Nigerian government has continuously made efforts to address these challenges, but they have proved to be complex and demanding. This paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the challenges of national security in Nigeria, examining their causes and implications, as well as proposing potential solutions to mitigate their effects. Making use of secondary sources of data the study would employ qualitative and descriptive method of analysis in the cause of the research. The findings of this study would be valuable in understanding the multifaceted nature of national security and inform policymakers in creating effective strategies to safeguard the nation's security.*

**Keywords:** Nation, Security, Nigeria, Ethnicity, Government

### **Introduction**

National security is a combination of two terms- "Nation" and "Security", thus it alludes to the fact that National Security has to do with how secure or insecure a nation is at a particular point in time. Security revolves around the matters of safety. This discourse would be having Nigeria as its main focus, hence the questions that would be addressed include the following- What is a Nation? Is Nigeria a nation? What is the meaning of National Security? To what extent is Nigeria secured? And what are the possible ways of tackling Nigeria's security challenges?

### **What is a Nation?**

Ideally a nation involves a body of people having the same language, culture, common historical experience and popular will and at the same time inhabiting a geographically contiguous territory. Various scholars have tried to define a nation from various perspectives. According to Muir in Obi (2009), a nation is a body of people who feel themselves to be naturally linked together by certain activities which are so strong and real for them that they can live happily together, are dissatisfied when disunited and cannot tolerate subjection to people who do not share these ties. Barker in Obi (2009) more elaborately defines a nation as a body of men, inhabiting a definite territory, who normally are drawn from different races, but possesses a common stock of thoughts and feelings acquired and transmitted during the course of a common history; who on the whole and in the main, though more in the past than in the present, include in that common stock a common religious belief; who generally and as a rule use a common language as the vehicle of their thought and feelings, also cherish a common will and accordingly form or tend to form a separate state for the expression and realization of that will. From the above definition it is clear that what forms a nation are elements such as similarities among the people, a sense of connection and a desire of their people to control themselves politically. It also has to be stated that some of the defining characteristics of a nation are not cast on stone because it is still easy to identify a people who lack some of them but which can no doubt be referred to as a nation. To buttress this point further Hague and Harrap (2001) note that seeking to reduce the idea of a nation to a shared ancestry or indeed to any other single factor, is a fruitless exercise. A shared language for example is taken as evidence of a common nationality but, if so, it is a misleading guide. Switzerland is indisputably a single nation even though French, German and Italian are spoken there. Indeed, to a large extent nations are "imagined communities" that is a nation can really only be defined as any group which upholds a claim to be regarded as such, hence Rourke and Boyer (1998) posit that "a feeling of community is a key element that helps define a nation". Perception is of essence in this regard, this is because for all the similarities that a group might have, it is not a nation unless it feels like one. what this means is that those within a group must perceive that they share similarities and are bound together by them.

From the foregoing explanations there are two perspectives to understanding the concept of a nation and they are first, a nation could be a group with a common stock origin and secondly a nation could be a group made up of different stock and origin but have over time developed a sense and feeling of community and oneness. These perspectives are aptly articulated by Olukoju, et al (2018) stating that a nation can be construed in two basic ways namely as a primordial identity or instrumental identity. In the primordial sense, a nation consists of groups with common descent, common language and ways of life. The people in this case have been together from time immemorial and have national heroes and traditions that define them as a people. The people therein have a common sense of history and mythical traditions of origin binding such people together.

On the other hand, the instrumentalist conception of a nation is that of some contiguous groups brought together by an accident of history to become a people. The people are placed into a particular setting (territory), with some laws and legal rules, and national metaphysics expected to give the people a unity of purpose. Here nations are formed by bringing different groups together and giving them a national identity. A third force is needed for making this happen. For example, the Nigerian “nation” emerged from two historical events namely- the allocation of Nigeria to the British at the Berlin West African conference of 1884/1885 and secondly the effrontery of the British in amalgamating the northern and southern protectorates they had initially created for economic reasons.

### **Is Nigeria a Nation?**

Having defined a nation variously, the next line of discourse is to determine the extent at which Nigeria is a nation. The Nigerian nationhood could be properly construed within the instrumental identity as earlier highlighted. This is because Nigeria is made up of contiguous groups brought together by an accident of history through the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates by the British. These groups that make up Nigeria do not have a common language, culture or origin even though they inhabit a geographically contiguous territory. Unfortunately, since the amalgamation of the various groups that make up Nigeria their experience so far have not engendered a popular will and neither has it encouraged a feeling of community among them and therefore these groups do not feel naturally linked together by any bond strong and real enough to live happily together, thereby reducing Nigeria to a mere geographical expression. Nigeria is a nation to the extent that it is made up of a people inhabiting a definite territory. According to Barker in Obi (2006), even though a nation may be made up of people of different races and ethnicities these people ought to possess a common stock of thoughts and this common stock includes a common religious belief and common language as a vehicle to express their nationalistic feelings and thought. Apart from the absence of a common religious belief Nigeria to some extent fits into this definition of a nation, but the trouble here is that in as much as Nigeria has adopted English as a common language to be used as a vehicle to express their nationalistic feelings and thought, the nationalistic feelings that are dominantly expressed are ethnic feelings rather than feelings that has a Nigerian outlook. Ethnic feelings are prevalent in Nigeria today and it is inimical to the quest for a Nigerian nation. Ethnicity thrives on smaller group loyalties, which undermine loyalties to the emerging nation. Ethnic loyalties entail complete attachment to traditional values and institutions of an ethnic group which inhibit integration on a wider scale. This is thus the case with Nigeria where ethnic sentiments has promoted discriminatory practices in appointments and promotions, admissions into institutions of higher learning and award of scholarships, which affect the youth directly. Ethnicity has prevented the development of nationalist feelings (nationalism) in Nigeria. The youth who is denied admission into tertiary institution, a job or scholarships because he comes from a particular ethnic group while the position is given to someone else he is better than, would naturally develop hatred for the Nigerian system. He may be forced to learn the national anthem or to salute the flag on parade grounds, but he will owe no genuine allegiance to these symbols or the Nigerian project. Naturally such a youth can never devout himself/herself to the defense and support of Nigeria rather he/she would only be concerned on how to either loot or sabotage the system for his/her own personal interest and this is how threats to national security is internally inspired and developed.

### **What is National Security?**

According to Arnold Wolfers as quoted in Paleri (2008), national security objectively means the absence of threats to acquired values and subjectively, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. In the case of Nigeria the issue is that given the various internal threats to our nationhood national consciousness has not been developed among the various component groups hence there is minimal sense of love for the nation leading to a lack of commitment to the Nigerian project. With this kind of environment there is little or no generally accepted values, (that bind the country as one), which are expected to be protected and defended in the interest of national security. Hence to everyone anything goes as long as it suits personal or ethnic interest.

Again, according to Paleri (2008), national security is the measurable state of the capability of a nation to overcome the multi-dimensional threats to the apparent well-being of its people and its survival as a nation at any

given time by balancing all instruments of state policy through governance. In the Nigerian situation the problem has to do with inability and the unwillingness of the political class to properly balance the instruments of state policy in eliminating threats to national security. Therefore as a result of poor management of the nation's resources as well as the low quality leadership and governance in Nigeria the well-being of its people is highly jeopardized, and when the well-being of a people is not guaranteed national security is at risk.

### **To what extent is Nigeria secure?**

Given the abysmal performance of policy makers/government in Nigeria, there is dissatisfaction and grudges among the various groups and sections in Nigeria. This is a very great threat to national security in Nigeria because all it would take is a little stirring and there would be an implosion. Hence the threats to Nigeria's security are mainly internal and not external and these threats are not necessarily military.

A key threat to National Security in Nigeria is poverty. According to Nweke (2007), poverty provides the objective as well as the subjective context for the high level of insecurity in the country. He also observed that "the distribution of national wealth is very uneven and poverty is the first threat to peace and stability". Similarly, he also observed that "90% of national wealth is in the hands of only 10% of the population. 44% of the population is young, and an average of three million people is thrown into the saturated job market without skills every year". Accordingly, a combination of widening gap in income inequality, worsening unemployment situation and perceptions of group discrimination and marginalisation based on ethnic, religious, and communal differences create rigid identity divides based on us versus them syndrome, fan the embers of group hatred and ignite tensions and even violent conflicts (Jega, 2007). It is therefore considered a root of conflicts and uprisings in Nigeria. It particularly creates situations in which individuals, be it civilians or soldiers, left to fend for themselves, engage in criminality or terrorist activities considering that they have nothing to lose. These dispositions culminate to generate a state of national insecurity in Nigeria.

Next to poverty is ethno-religious crisis. This crisis has remained protracted, endemic and has ranked very high as an issue of concern in national security. For example, one study listed about twenty-two major civil disturbances between May 1999 and July 2003 (Alubo, 2002), while another listed as much as forty incidences of ethno-religious and communal clashes between 2003 and 2006 (Jega, 2002). According to Nwanegbo (2005), internal conflicts in Nigeria and Africa in general are actually and mainly caused by contest over the control of scarce resources and it is those deprived or that feels deprived that tries to either protect or defend their interest or vent frustration in what ends up to be inter-ethnic conflicts, inter group wars or civil revolutions. He went on to argue rightly that internal conflicts have caused a lot of damages to both the political, economic, social and environmental order in Nigeria.

In addition, religious crisis has manifested in several ways ranging from incitement to religious riot and from interfaith violent clashes to terrorism. The religious fundamentalists have degenerated into high level intolerance that manifest in terror attack, especially Islamic sect popularly known as Boko-Haram. While the activities and attack are predominantly based in the Northern region of Nigeria, its impact pervades the nation with sense of insecurity. Worthy of note is the high profile bombings at Nigerian police headquarters and United Nations House, all in Abuja and suspected serious threats for more actions.

Akin to religious crisis are ethnic conflicts. Prior to amalgamation of northern and southern protectorate by colonial regime of Great Britain in 1914, there have been records and events of long standing hostility, xenophobia and intolerance among various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. These conditions are rift and on the increase and most times intermingle with religious colouration. As a result, there exist suspicions among ethnic extractions that engage in agitations and demands to address perceived denials and marginalisation. These nationalities though interact and relate as Nigerians, through their negative and most often inflame utterances and actions that undermine the collective security of the nation and citizens. Therefore, at the heart of our crisis of national security is ethno-related disgust that Nigerians harbour for each other, because every Nigerian deduces an all-important cleavage to our immediate ethnic community, (Jega, 2002).

### **Achieving National Security in Nigeria**

Given that the threat to national security in Nigeria is mostly internal, to a great extent achieving national would mostly be by a non-military approach. The key to achieving national security in Nigeria is nation building. Nigeria would be secured when the various centrifugal forces within the country are removed and the feeling of oneness and community is developed; in other words, we have to build the nation in order to secure the nation. According to Nwabughogu (2009), nation building is a search for nationhood. It is a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their

commitment to a nation. It also involves the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation. Thus, nation-building would normally involve the creation of impressive elements of organization (political, social, and economic) that characterize a modern state such as good roads, water supply, facilities for education and health, efficient communication, opportunities for employment and so on. These would make citizens develop love for their country. To achieve this some things are necessary and they include-

### **Good Leadership**

Bad leadership has remained the greatest problem besetting Nigeria since her independence. While some other countries in Europe and Asia have had strong and viable leadership which has led to their growth and development, Nigeria is still in search of a trail-blazing leadership for nation building.

The first step to ensuring good leadership is to ensure that the right leaders come on board through a free and fair election (Njoku, 2008). Hence a true democratic leadership is a pre-requisite for nation building. Nigeria needs leaders who have exhibited their clear cut popularity at the polls devoid of rigging. This would make the leaders know that they are responsible to the people who voted them in and that they could be voted out if they fail to bring the dividend of democracy as well as development to the people. They would endeavour to bring development to the people by providing basic amenities and necessary infrastructures for the masses. When elections are rigged, it results in democratic-autocracy, where leaders act without considering the views and opinion of the people because they know that their mandate did not come from them, they tend to take laws into their hands and violate human rights. This kind of situation has a negative effect on nation building, (Ukoima, 2016).

An aspect of good leadership that is necessary for nation building has to do with transparency and accountability. Nigerian leaders should see themselves as stewards of the people and so endeavour to be accountable to them and transparent as well, eschewing greed, and all forms of corruption and by so doing inspire the confidence of the people. When the people are confident of their leaders it enhances their confidence in the nation and nation-building would be a lot easier as nation-building can never be achieved unless confidence in the nation is developed among the people. Again, Nigeria needs leaders who are dully educated and have undergone leadership training in theory and practice, leaders with intellectual and technocratic skills. According to Njoku (2008) such leaders would possess dully thought-out philosophical background for any action and program initiated, with contingency plans to make up for the short falls inherent in such policies and their implementation. They would have the ability to coordinate and utilize the powers vested on them to mobilize the abundant human and material resources for the development of the nation. If Nigeria should get such calibre of leaders as opposed to what we currently have which consist of former military men without any leadership training nation-building would be a lot more achievable. This is because this calibre of leaders based on their training would be well abreast with all the intricacies involved with nation building and development, (Momodu, 2016).

Next is that as confidence is built among the people through good leadership it motivates them to ever be willing to contribute their own quota towards national development and nation building.

Good leadership also involves good governance which according to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific includes participation of the led which could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It also includes accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, equity and inclusiveness. It is important to note that equity and inclusiveness in governance would reduce ethnic sentiment and cleavages to the dearest minimum. Good governance ensures consensus is reached among the several actors and view points in a given society. It as well follows the rules of law. Good governance in Nigeria would ensure that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of society. Thus in the atmosphere of good governance Nigeria can indeed tow the path of nation-building.

### **Restructuring**

Nigeria is a country made up of so many ethnic nationalities with different historical antecedents, culture, language and even religion. Therefore, if nation-building would be achieved in Nigeria, the principles of true federalism must be strictly adhered to. In a federal system of government, the tiers of government ought to share political powers as expressly spelt out in the constitution. But it is quite unfortunate that the foundation on which Nigeria constitution is operated especially since the current democratic dispensation has not reflected a true federal structure at all. The fact is that the structure of Nigeria as it is now is not working. And the way to fix it is to restructure our federation. According to Momodu (2016), the structural defects in Nigeria have become the single most important inhibition of its growth and development. Currently, Nigeria has a strong center and weak states.

The states are now more like administrative units of the federal government. The relationship between the centre and the state still reflects the military command structure, which is a carryover from the military administration. According to Ukoima (2016), it is a fundamental reality that Nigeria cannot have a strong and united federation unless and until the constituent parts are sufficiently empowered by enabling practices that conform to the principles of federalism.

Thus, restructuring Nigeria is our chance to rebirth a new Nigeria. The country as it is now needs to immediately implement the long-standing demand for a true federal structure both fiscally and structurally and the way to begin is to review the current revenue allocation formula which is lopsided and ensure a total devolution of powers. Indeed, if Nigeria would remain one and indivisible then restructuring our federation into a true federal state is a must.

### **Conclusion**

Security of life and property is a fundamental human right guaranteed under Nigeria's constitution. Unfortunately, the governments since 1999 have faced a great challenge in efforts to guarantee security in the country. We have examined the conditions that predispose the citizens and country to insecurity to include; poverty, religious crises and terror attacks, kidnapping and ethnic conflicts. Also traced to the problems are bad governance, corruption, high unemployment, and the breakdown of societal values, leading to community unrest. It also noted that securing Nigerian state would be better achieved when more emphasis is laid on non-military approach and to human security. This we note must be accentuated with inspired leadership will and service above self and ethnic bias in a bid to instil the patriotic zeal required for national security and development. Nigeria's security objects can therefore be best achieved in the context of a sustainable process of democratic development. Also, government at all levels should urgently start to take care of the immediate needs of Nigerians like food, shelter, employment, basic infrastructure, reduction of poverty and improved security, this will in turn enhance the sense of nationhood among citizens and encourage nation building and national security.

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