TERRORISM AND NIGERIA'S RELATIONS WITH HER WEST AFRICAN NEIGHBOURS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined terrorism and Nigeria's relations with her West African neighbours. For some time, Nigeria's geographic and demographic superiority reinforced its stance as the big brother of other African states. With Nigeria's foreign policy centred on Africa, Nigeria's relations with her neighbours have been somewhat mutual – except for a few skirmishes. This dynamic changed with Nigeria's domestic struggles against terrorism and the consequent rising insecurity. This paper argues that the realisation that joint collaboration in the West African sub-region is the best approach to combat the menace of terrorism.
Key words: collective security, foreign policy, insecurity, terrorism, security.

Introduction

On the basis of geographical and demographic strength, Nigeria is known as the giant of Africa, naturally entrusted with the (unofficial) big brother role. This role, in strategic terms, may be referred to as 'hegemonic role'. Within the sphere of international relations, therefore, a hegemon is a dominant power whose interests not only override that of others often, but who uses her dominance to support the growth of other lesser powers. In the case of Nigeria and her West African neighbours like Cameroon, Benin, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Niger, the relations have been both mutual and conflictual – conflictual in the case of the then quagmire

between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. That Nigeria is a hegemon in the West African hegemon implies that whatever happens in Nigeria would likely affect her neighbours. This fact could be better illustrated with the inundation of the Nigerian state by acts of insurgency and terrorism since 2009.Scholars like Adetula (2014) and Onuoha (2014) have alluded to the fact that terrorist insurgency in Nigeria may have been imported from other (neighbouring) African countries like Mali, Mauritania and Libya. So, it cannot be a surprise that these fellow African States suffer the consequences in like measure.

Be that as it may, a plethora of works exist on Nigeria's relations with her neighbours (see Omede, 2006; Adetula, 2014; Ogbu & Olakunle, 2019; Mustapha et al, 2020; for instance). Most of these studies focused on the rapprochement thrust of Nigerian foreign policy since independence. Given this scenario, this paper focuses on how terrorism has impacted on the relations between Nigeria and her next-door neighbours.

Nigeria's Foreign Policy in the West African sub-Region

Foreign policy is a tool for building partnerships and relating with all actors in the international scene. In the light of this, foreign policy should reflect the realities of the domestic scene, and employ policies that will further their interests. This embodies the core essence of international interactions, which is to derive from nations, those things which they need, but cannot produce and also to dispose of those things that they have in abundance, but do not need, in order to derive the resources, they will use in paying for their needs (Obi, 2015).

Hill (2003) opines that foreign policy is the substance of nation's efforts to promote its interests, vis-à-vis other nations. Every nation on the international stage is guided by national interest and ideology and every action taken, must be geared towards achieving that goal or at the very least, not hurting them, or jeopardising the chance of attaining them.

Scholars view Nigeria's foreign policy thrust from the lens of four concentric circles which depict national interest (Ogbu, 2019; Adetula, 2014; etc.). Thus, while the innermost circle represents Nigeria's own security, independence and prosperity, and is centred on its immediate neighbours (Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger), the second circle revolves around Nigeria's relations with its West African neighbours. In the same vein, while the third circle focuses on continental African issues related to peace, development and democratisation, the fourth circle revolves around Nigeria's relations with organisations, institutions and states outside the shores of Africa.

Since independence, Nigeria centred her foreign policy on Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, working assiduously for the integration, peace and the banishment of colonialism from African shores. This was very evident in Nigeria's premier and premium position during the fight against apartheid in South Africa, pouring in money and taxing every Nigerian to be sure that South Africa gains her independence, and joins the rank and file of the new and emerging independent African states. Nigeria was also involved in conflict resolution through the African Union and ECOWAS. Nigerian foreign policy was all about fostering unity and cooperation among African states, keeping the peace and presenting a united front at the world stage.

So, for Nigeria, economic development was tied to the economic development of other African states. Nigeria's foreign policy was spurred on by her aspirations to become a regional power and her desire to see Africa take pride of place on the world stage. This was the main thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy, but just like Kayode (2016) said, other factors that influenced the direction of Nigeria's foreign policy is the fact that the Nigerian economy was mostly oil-driven, large population, military capability and the nature of Nigeria's political leadership. The domestic policies of the government had to tally with their foreign policy; after all, what is foreign policy other than establishing and maintaining a cordial and mutually beneficial

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relationship with other nations of the world? So, the foreign policies had to tally with the domestic policies at home. The progress made by Nigeria and her foreign policy to portray Nigeria as the giant of Africa, the largest and most viable economy in Africa and a regional power, started taking huge hits with the coming of Boko Haram and their reign of terror. Their destabilising effect on the economy, the usurping of their place in African affairs and the fact that Nigeria could no longer ignore the existential threat coming from within her border to focus on Africa and her problems, meant a change in foreign policy direction and an attempt to mitigate the damage done to the Nigerian image by terrorism. The effects of terrorism on Nigeria's foreign policy are many and they have far-reaching consequences.

Impact of Terrorism on Nigeria's Relations with her West African Neighbours

Since Boko Haram transcended national borders and into the territories of other states, it ceased to be a Nigerian problem and became an international menace. Boko Haram became very active in Chad, Cameroun, Niger Republic and other neighbouring African states. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, terrorism became not just mainstream, but there became and interconnectivity amongst terrorist groups in the world. Boko Haram aligned with other big terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab in Somalia, AQIM and other similar groups. Cannon and Iyekekpolo (2019) posit that trans-border terrorism is simply when groups operate from any other state outside their home state, like Boko Haram operating in Cameroun or Al Shabaab operating anywhere else apart from Somalia. After 9/11, many terrorist cells and organisations came together to train, plan and carry out attacks or Jihad all over the world and Boko Haram was not left out. Al Qaeda influence on Boko Haram was traced back as far back the early 2000s, during the time of Mohammed Yusuf, showing that the former bank rolled Islamist political organisations in Nigeria at different times, with the ultimate aim of waging Jihad in Nigeria. These connections were not definitive; rather they were pieced together by scholars over the years, seeing as Boko Haram became more and more sophisticated, bold, daring and eventually employed the use of suicide bombers, a never-before-seen phenomenon in Nigeria (Cummings, 2017). These developments pointed to affiliations with Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab and other organisations.

Nigeria had to involve other nations, so they can collectively fight Boko Haram and groups like it, because of their expansionist activities, spreading their tentacles to Algeria, Mali, Somalia, Libya, Cameroon, Niger Republic, Chad and other neighbouring states. To fight Boko Haram, these affected countries have to collectively pool resources and synchronise efforts. The increasing expansion of terrorism and terrorist activities into other African countries by both internal and external forces, is proof that no country is immune, no matter how remote or small they are, making it absolutely necessary that nations, States and organisations come together to fight the menace. This will be achieved by the bilateral and multilateral efforts of affected nations, through the instrumentality of foreign policy, with the view to achieving national development.

For most countries, especially countries of Africa like Nigeria that are hard hit with issues of terrorism, security assumes paramount importance and as such, it is in the national interest of such countries to pursue foreign policies that will provide or improve security. The activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria have caused a fundamental change in the thrust of the country's foreign policy, with the country seeking to collaborate with other countries affected by the menace, in a bid to collectively seek an end to Boko Haram's reign of terror.

Ate (2011) is of the view that the threat of the terrorist activities of Boko haram has brought to the front burner issues of core interests of national security in her foreign policy with her immediate neighbours. The onslaught of Boko Haram from 2009 caused a shift in foreign policy, leading to the revival and expansion the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to

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include counter terrorism. This measure was important because insurgency was no longer a purely Nigerian problem rather, it has entered neighbouring states like Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Benin Republic and as such, these countries must work together to combat the deadly menace. Under President Jonathan, this task force was empowered, with Nigeria heading it and contributing most of the funds and manpower. The borders of these countries, provided access to, and for arms, ammunition, training grounds, and have become a terrorist's haven.

Successive Nigerian governments have channelled their energy and resources into conflict resolution in Africa, in the belief that a nation cannot have peace and prosperity if all other countries around her are engulfed in conflict. In the case of Nigeria, however, Ogunbi et al (2016) pointed out that it has become ironical that Nigeria that used to be at the forefront in peace-keeping operations is now in the unenviable position of depending on its smaller neighbours to combat terrorism and insurgency. Albert (2017, p.123) expressed perfect agreement with this change in the regional power dynamics when he asserted that:

> …nations that have similar potential threats would work together to provide a safe environment for themselves given the fact that the international system is anarchical, as the realists argue. This security regimen has been adopted by the countries in the LCB for managing the ongoing Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria following the realisation that the problem is not necessarily Nigerian, as initially perceived, but a regional question.

Deducible from the above assertion is the fact that insecurity occasioned by terrorism have become regionalised, and therefore, requires collective effort from states in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, it could be said that one major implication of terrorism in the West African sub-region is that it has demonstrated that Nigeria's economic might in the region is incapable of resolving security threats in the region, hence the recourse to collective security. Another implication is that the weak, or compromised political leadership in Nigeria since 2015 appears to lack the wherewithal to enforce counterterrorism measures in the sub-region. Corroborating this fact, Tull and Weber (2015) stated that since March 2015, Cameroon and Chad have been conducting military operations in the border regions, sometimes on Nigerian territory, in an effort to push back the terrorists. These operations were in response to attacks across their borders with Nigeria by Boko Haram. The above scenario portrays the fact that perhaps, Nigeria's neighbours no longer count on the capacity of Nigeria to secure the sub-region, almost single-handedly.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

Since independence, Nigeria's foreign policy has been Afrocentric in nature, focusing all her energies on helping other African countries regain freedom from their colonial masters and promoting black culture. Nigeria recorded a lot of success in this area, sending money and troops to help quell uprisings all over Africa and generally being their brother's keeper. It is worthy to note that while Nigeria fought for other countries and generally play her self-appointed role as Africa's giant, internally, the Nigerian society and economy was coming apart at the seams.

Nigeria knew that to fight terrorism, it required the aid and support of other countries through the instrumentation of foreign policy. This led to the formation of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the adoption of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the undertaking of several other pacts and alliances all aimed at guarding the national borders of the countries of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, cutting off aid and ammunition routes for the terrorists, to enable the countries fight and contain terrorism within their national borders.

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Terrorism changed the thrust of Nigeria's foreign policy as it is very obvious that Nigeria had to work assiduously to clean up her image abroad, and generally take back her pride of place as Africa's giant and leader in regional politics.

Through the instrumentality of the MNJTF, some progresses have been made in countering terrorism in the West African sub-region. But then, a lot still remains to be done. There is need to strengthen and expand the MNJTF so as to cover all the borders through which terrorists have been operating. Also, it would be necessary for each state in the sub-region to set up, or strengthen the existing domestic counterterrorism agencies. It should be added that attention should be paid to socioeconomic development so as to make terrorism less attractive to the large army of the unemployed.

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