

## Discerning Security Policy in Trump's America First Security Strategy: Lesson for Nigeria's One-off-for-all-time *National Security Strategy* bereft of Policy

As the leading country in the world, the United States' experiences have so often served as models for other countries who are awed by most things America. However, not most things America fit as models for other countries. This is because there is a history, experience and reality behind most things America that makes them unfit as models in other countries. One such model is national security.

The concept of national security is a quintessential American brand with a history, experience and reality that is uniquely American. National security in America is not a model for other countries. Using President Donald J. Trump's America First Security Strategy which represents the Trump's administration's take and interpretation of America's time tested and consistent security policy, I bring a local perspective to bear on a seemingly global model of national security idea.

A look at the National Security Act of 1947, the legislation that is the bedrock of US national security policy and the Nigeria's National Security Agencies Act would demonstrate the inspiration and limit of the application of the US's idea to the local experience. The buck stopped at the point of inspiration only!

The difference is that the 1947 Act has consistently served as the policy framework for the country's conduct on what it termed national security. The difference can be discern in the strategies put up by administrations – whether Republican and Democrat led – within the framework of the policy and in the context of what I described as style, time, space and personality, over the causes and courses of projecting the country's domestic driven engagement with the rest of the world.

An examination of the Trump's America First National Security Strategy would contextualise the adherence to the dictate of the National Security Act of 1947. I noted (See [adoyionoja.org](http://adoyionoja.org) for my article "Towards an Explanation of the Origin of National Security") that while the initial focus of national security was exogenous, the McVeigh incident of 1995 altered this focus to include endogenous issues that endangered national security. This set the tone to focusing on Americans– indigenous and naturalised – as potential sources of threat to national security.

The creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by the Bush administration was part of that administration's security strategy to dealing with domestic threats that culminated with the 9/11 attacks. In the Trump's security strategy, the construction of the wall and reforming and tightening immigration (see protect the American people, the homeland and the American way of life) constituted the first priority in the four-issue

approach (others included promoting American prosperity, preserve peace through strength and advance American influence) to be addressed in the security strategy.

Now compare this with the Nigeria National Security Agencies Act in the context of policy and in administrations strategies towards implementing the policy. The NSA is not a policy (as I noted in the article "Towards an Explanation of the Origin of National Security"). It is the instrument that created the agencies of national security as it was called in Nigeria. What is this national security? Whose national security is it? What are the issues of national security? These questions, constituting policy, were not addressed by the NSA Act. There were never strategies, as can be discerned in the various administrations in the United States, by the respective governments in Nigeria outlining the "how" to attaining national security.

With the exception of the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo who demonstrated awareness of the importance of security in a democracy and proceeded to provide what he termed the "Grand National Security Strategy" as a document that guided his administration's implementation of its views on security or national security, there was no any other administration with this record. The President Obasanjo's GNSS was not anchored on any security policy. With the end of his tenure, the regimes that followed were compelled by the conventional understanding of security (see [adoyionoja.org](http://adoyionoja.org) for my article "Beginning the Security Conversation in Nigeria" and or see the link "Stripping" for a four part series on what is security from the military, political, intellectual and most Nigerians") to guide their administrations' programme on security.

In 2014, the Office of the National Security Adviser, obviously realising it had operated a security perspective without a document, hurriedly compiled and published what it described as the *National Security Strategy* (see chapter 6 of my forthcoming book *Security: A Brief Encounter in Nigeria* for my critique) and what I now labelled as a one-off-for-all-time security strategy that was the "how" of security without the "what", "whose" and "issues" of policy within what is an agreeable but non existent security policy known only to the military and political classes.

In discerning the workings of the US national security policy in Trump's security strategy, I shall focus on the key elements of the Executive Summary including Introduction, A Competitive World and An America First National Security Strategy. I shall analyse this and speak, in conclusion, to the lessons in this for Nigeria on the need for a security policy that will drive administrations' strategies other than the one-off-for-all-time *National Security Strategy* compiled by the Office of the National Security Adviser.

There is no better time for the democratic government in Nigeria to take ownership of and own security than now. This is because they are elected to provide security and the

security in question differ from the one associated with the military. The security in question encompasses all things that governance through election engenders including the security type associated with the military.

## The America First National Security Strategy

### Introduction

Mr. Trump's introduction began with "an America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad..." The term "safe" and "prosperous" set the tone of what constitutes security for the United States. In other words, America does not feel safe inside and outside her borders and therefore the safety of Americans inside and outside their borders is the foundation of its security. Put in context, the safety of Americans has been an issue since the United States assumed global leadership in the last century. The issue of safety did heighten in the closing decades of the last century particularly with the end of the Cold War and the commencement of conflict on civilisational lines.

One of the reasons America remained a magnet and thus a model for most countries of the world is its economic performance. To buttress this performance is the foundation of America's power in America and everywhere else in the world. It is the foundation of national security because as the President asserted the provision of economic security for Americans is national security. America's prosperity is a factor from its engagement all over the world and without its unparalleled economic development, there will be no basis for security at home and abroad.

Thus for Mr. Trump's strategy, putting America first was based on "American principles, assessment of U.S. interests and a determination to tackle the challenges that we face". As a strategy of "principled realism", it was guided by "outcomes" not "ideology". It is instructive to note that one of the staying power of most Americans is the bond of its peoples regardless of their places of origin, religion or race and a fact that Mr. Trump noted when he alluded to "united by the bonds of history, culture, beliefs and principles that define who we are". Can Nigerians say this of themselves?

American global dominance envied by most people in the world according to Mr. Trump was "neither inevitable nor accidental". America paid the price to attain this feat – from the civil war to the civil rights movements to the first and second world wars, the Cold War, the creation of international institutions such as the United Nations, the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation were parts of the struggle to establish America's place in the world. Mr. Trump was right to observe that with all these stunning

successes, complacency developed and America began to drift. Accordingly, Mr. Trump was of the view that:

“we stood by while countries exploited the international institutions we helped to build. They subsidised their industries, forced technology transfers and distorted markets. These and other actions challenged America’s economic security. At home, excessive regulations and high taxes stifled growth and weakened free enterprise – history’s greatest antidote to poverty. Each time government encroached on the productive activities of private commerce, it threatened not only our prosperity but also the spirit of creation and innovation that has been key to our national greatness.”

In the last 57 years of Nigeria’s independence, what was the cumulative experience in building a nation out of nationalities? What bond is there among Nigerian nationalities? What sense of security – economic or otherwise – do Nigerians nationalities feel as a result of governance to lay the foundation of the conception of “security” or “national security”? How much of nature’s abundant resources has governance translated into opportunity for Nigerians to speak of optimum development within in order to lay the foundation for looking beyond Nigeria’s borders? What contributions are there to the spread of the resourcefulness of Nigerians, borne out of governance within, in the West African sub region for instance? What institutions has Nigeria helped created within the sub region that has been instrumental to the growth of the region?

### **A Competitive World**

The world has indeed grown competitive and some degree of the U.S. market share whether in economic, political or diplomatic terms – have been parcelled out by other powers notably China and Russia. Mr. Trump’s America First security strategy is set to regaining this share back. This will be accomplished according to Mr. Trump by rethinking the policies of the past two decades – “policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners.” Concluding, Mr. Trump noted that “for the most part, this premise turned out to be false.”

There is an unmistakable power politics in Mr. Trump attempt to re-establish U.S. dominance in the areas he argued America lost ground. Mr. Trump’s position did not depart from the tradition of the United States in exercising its national security thrust since it assumed global leadership in the last century. Increasingly bellicose to the point of unilateralism, Mr. Trump realistically understand that the view that “for the most part, this premise turned out to be false” remained in the realm of rhetoric as the United States has

increasingly thought it wise to enlist the support of China in the resolution of the Korean crisis and recognise the place of Russia in the resolution of most conflict – in the Middle East, Eastern Europe etc.

Mr. Trump reminded his listener that “America’s military remains the strongest in the world”. While admitting to the advancement of other powers militarily in different areas which threaten the homeland, America’s interests in the world and her allies, Mr. Trump resolved that “our task is to ensure that American military superiority endures, and in combination with other elements of national power, is ready to protect Americans against sophisticated challenges to national security”.

The reference to economic and military power and to other elements of national power draws attention to what is the United States national security and above all to the policy that was codified in the legislation of 1947. Mr. Trump’s America First Security Strategy seeks to advance the weakening of America’s strength by previous administrations’ programmes and engagements.

According to Mr. Trump’ strategy, America learned the difficult lesson that when America does not lead, malign actors fill the void to the disadvantage of the United States. When America does lead, however, from a position of strength and confidence and in accordance with our interests and values, all benefit. While the jury is out as to the validity of this claim, what is important to note is Mr. Trump’s emphasis on “position of strength...” and “in accordance with our interests and values...” These were indicative of U.S. national security’s history, experience and reality. The reference to strength connotes military and economic strength which gives rise to other forms of strength including the so-called soft power and, interests and values connotes American’s domestic and global interests which spanned economic, military, cultural and political.

Where is the sense of “national security”, if we even define national security as the consensus of Nigeria’s three dominant nationalities and other nationalities, in government pronouncement in Nigeria? Where is the sense of “national security” in the one-off-for-all-time national security strategy orchestrated by the ONSA that does not even enjoy the ONSA and by extension the current administration it represent own patronage in the implementation of the administration’s view on security? Judging from the fact that strategy represents individual administration’s take on the country’s security policy, should the ONSA not be advising the National Assembly and other stockholders and stakeholders to work towards an all Nigerian made security policy which would become the anchor of different administrations strategy as did Dr. Obasanjo’s Grand National Security Strategy during his eight year tenure?

## **An America First National Security Strategy**

Having outlined the challenges confronting the United States from his administration's perspectives, Mr. Trump christened his security strategy as "America First" in other words putting the United States as priority. In his election campaign, Mr. Trump had promised to "make America great again" or (MAGA). According to Mr. Trump, the challenges facing America was not a passing trends or momentary problems. These challenges were "intertwined, long-term challenges that demand our sustained national attention and commitment". It was Mr. Trump's view that:

"America possesses unmatched political, economic, military and technological advantages. But to maintain these advantages, build upon our strengths and unleash the talents of the American people, we must protect four vital national interests in this competitive world."

Thus the security strategy in the next four to eight years of Mr. Trump's presidency will focus on four key areas of national interests:

First, our fundamental responsibility was to protect the American people, the homeland and the American way of life. Obviously, not a new direction as we noted somewhere with the Bush administration's creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the Trump addition will include erecting and strengthening the borders and reforming the immigration system. Recall the ban placed on selected countries or the so-called Muslim ban that was overturned by the courts system. The administration had woken up to doing more to protecting the American people from external and internal attacks.

Second, the strategy will promote American prosperity by rejuvenating the economy for the benefit of American workers and companies. Mr. Trump made it clear that economic security is national security. To this end, bringing back companies and jobs and withdrawing the U.S. from certain agreements thought to be unfair to American interests including the Trans Pacific Partners and the Climate Accord were highlights of the administration's attempt to return advantage to the U.S. economy. The issue of preservation of the U.S. lead in research and technology was the focus of Fareed Zakaria's Global Public Square where he noted the effect of the significant cut in investment in the area that had undermines U.S. competitiveness in major areas of the economy. It would appear that Mr. Trump's strategy was set to overturning this.

Third, the preservation of peace through strength was another focus of the Trump America First strategy. This would be accomplished by rebuilding the military so that it remained pre-eminent, deterred America's adversaries and if necessary, was able to fight

and win. It included competing with all tools of national power to ensure that regions of the world were not dominated by one power. It acknowledged the role of allies and partners in the effort to magnifying U.S. power while equally reminding them of need to shoulder the responsibility to protect against common threats.

Four, the America First strategy will advance American influence "because a world that supports American interests and reflects our values makes America more secure and prosperous". America will compete and lead in multilateral organisations so that American interests and principles are protected. America can play a catalytic role in promoting private-sector-led economic growth, helping aspiring partners become future trading and security partners. America will remain a generous nation even as we expect others to share responsibility.

In concluding, Mr. Trump was of the view that "strengthening our sovereignty – the first duty of a government is to serve the interests of its own people – is a necessary condition for protecting these four national interests. In Mr. Trump's opinion, an America First National Security Strategy appreciates that America will catalyse conditions to unleash economic success for America and the world.

In the United States, Mr. Trump trumpeted that "free men and women have created the most just and prosperous nation in history. Our generation of Americans is now charged with preserving and defending that precious inheritance. This National Security Strategy shows the way."

Pursuing these four areas in the manner outlined in the strategy will strengthen America's national security from what Trump surmised as threat to America's post World War Two order from the military and economic standpoints. Nothing was novel in these areas as put forward in Trump's America First security strategy as they – the four areas covered – were extant issues taken from America's security policy developed following the end of the Second World War. All previous administrations have incorporated these issues in their strategies in the manner they deemed fit. The novelty as I noted was in the style, time, space and personality. Again these – style, time, space and personality – characterised previous administrations as well.

This is the Trump era. The background and analysis – America could not have fought and won hard battles, from the military and economic standpoints, only to become complacent at the point it should be reaping from the victories – provided the launch pad for the America First National Security Strategy.

All past administrations have focused on the homeland in their strategies but not in the manner that Trump proposed. The idea of making America prosperous was as old as the

reason most other countries envy America. In 1987, the concept of equating prosperity with national security was implicit in the Reagan strategy and as recently in the Obama strategy. In declaring that economic security is national security, Trump's America First strategy took this a notch further by reversing gains in areas such as the environment and certain trade deals he considered detrimental to America's prosperity. The policy was counterproductive in that it weakened America's influence in areas where United States leadership counts. The withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership, the Climate Change Accord and the persistent rhetoric on the Iran Nuclear Deal – institutions that America help create – weakened America's influence as far as these institutions and others were concerned.

In promoting peace through strength, again nothing was novel as previous administrations strategies keyed into this tested security policy of promoting peace by making America formidable in most sectors. The Reagan Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) or the Star War programme was reminiscent of this strategy. What was novel was Trump's undermining of diplomacy as a pillar for pursuing peace through strength making conflict likely in certain theatre. Again I noted the double edge sword that the repudiation of previous administrations commitment to multilateral platforms of addressing common issues that impact on the world as undermining United States influence.

America has always advance its interests on multilateral platforms except that previous administrations have not stressed the doctrine of sharing or picking their own bill as vociferously as Mr. Trump has been doing. Recall that President Bush had once threatened to withhold funds from the United Nations unless reforms were instituted. President Trump not only insisted that partners pick their share of the cost. President Trump had thrown cautious and diplomacy to the wind in the manner he hounded partners and others alike against taking United States resources and acting against her interests. Unlike previous administrations, President Trump differed to the extent that in the name of America First, President Trump was ready to upset what was thought to be conventions cast in steel.

This is where I talk about style, time, space and personality. The style differs with the advent of twitter governance and businesslike personality in public affairs. Both styles often leaves his officials constantly embarrassed and struggling to pick the pieces. These attitudes to public affairs, novel in the least as it defied the established institutional practices, contained the seeds for strengthening and weakening America's influence on the world stage.



## The Trump America First Security Strategy and the Nigerian One-off-for-time *National Security Strategy*

A country's security policy is the bulwark of its security strategy. A policy – any policy – answers the questions: what is the policy about, whose policy and what counts as policy issue(s). A strategy addresses the fourth question: how can the policy be achieved. Or if you like how can the first three of the policy be attained.

A security policy answers the questions: what is security, whose security and what counts as security issue(s). A security strategy addresses the fourth question: how can this security be achieved. Or if you like how can the first three issues of the policy be achieved.

A national security strategy which is regime specific adheres to the core elements of a country's national security policy. The strategy is regime bound because each regime differs significantly in style, time, space and personality.

This is the case with the United States with the world's most developed conception of national security- in policy and strategy. The United States has two political parties that differ in programme, style, time, space and now personality. However this differences, they are united in adhering and promoting the values, interests and aspirations of the United States of America. One area where this values, interests and aspirations manifest is the national security policy. Thus the security policy serves the ideological frameworks of the Republican and Democratic political parties in their views on domestic and foreign issues.

What we find contained in the Trump national security strategy which will guide his regime in the next four to eight years is the style, time, space and personality that influenced its making. The essential core of America's values, interests and aspirations, represented in the security policy, were not compromised in the making of the America First strategy. Indeed Trump's America First strategy seeks to bring this into sharp focus.

Nigeria has neither security policy that is a constant guide nor strategies reflective of political parties and regimes' take in their attempt to fulfil the content of the policy. Nigeria's successive administrations have not pursued consistent programmes that in the absence of security policy can surmised as pattern. This is the situation since independence. Official Nigeria particularly the political class since 1999 is either unaware of the need for a security philosophy within the context of the governing electoral democracy and thus policy or is aware but chose to feed on the ignorance of Nigerians as the prevailing rudderless state of security accommodates its interests. The followings are worth noting:

- The Trump strategy is not a policy. The strategy derive its strength from America's national security policy
- The strategy is President Trump's imprimatur, in the course of his presidency, in the pursuit of America's security policy. In this, President Trump merely followed the path of previous American presidents who came up with their own strategies
- Unlike the lack of security policy in Nigeria, America has a security policy that emerge from the post Second World War order from military and economic standpoint that addresses America's view on self and the world
- Unlike the *National Security Strategy* of Nigeria which was compiled and published in 2014, the American security strategies reflected each administrations take in the pursuit of United States security policy
- Of Nigeria's leaders of the past particularly when military rule became rapacious from the mid 1980s, there was never any need for a security policy let alone a strategy. Indeed the foundation for the mentality of equating security with the defence conduct of uniformed services was consolidated under military rule. Thus the military was the poster face of security!
- If the absence of security policy could be blamed on the arbitrariness of the military as the governing elite, what has civil electoral rule done since 1999 in fashioning security philosophy and policy for the country knowing they were elected to provide security?
- In 1999 with the enthronement of electoral democracy, only President Olusegun Obasanjo, of the presidents till date, saw the need for a strategy on security which guided his eight years in office. The Grand Strategy for National Security so called was a strategy. It was not based on any extant security policy. To some extent, Dr. Obasanjo should be given the credit for demonstrating the awareness of the need for security strategy in tandem with democratic practice
- In fact, the prevailing orientation of security suited the elected regimes that they saw no need for their intervention on security. This was in spite of the fact that Nigerians voted for these elected officials to provide security. Security in this instance has a deeper and all encompassing connotation than the one orchestrated into consciousness by the military and has since served the interests of the political and military class
- Therefore the intervention of elected official in changing this security narrative is necessary. Instead what is evident is the self preservation of the elected officials in their redefinition and/or acquiescing to the prevailing understanding of security as instituted by the military
- In the history of electoral democracy in Nigeria, the political class had viewed the military as the sole force capable of disrupting their hold on power. If security

meant placating the military with the largesse they once controlled and enjoyed as the governing elite and that has corroded their professionalism – largesse that has come to be associated with “security”, in the name of keeping the military quiet and in their barracks, it is a policy the civilian authority were ready to countenance

- In return for allowing the civilian stay in power, the military was given a *carte blanche* to manage security as the saw fit. Indeed the conduct of the ONSA was in line with this blind consensus in that the Office has progressively transformed into the *de facto* voice on security managed by serving and retired military officials. To this extent, it is a security practice that cater for the civilian political elite and their military collaborators
- The incidents of dissatisfaction with material existence of Nigerians all over the country which has deteriorated and in particular the variant in the north east has been used to project this security practice that worked in the favour of the civilian and military elite. The combined resources expended in the effort to combat the incidents dwarfed the entire resources voted for employment generation, education, health and infrastructures – areas that held the key to changing the security of Nigerians who elected them
- The downside is that these resources almost always ended in the pocket of the civilian and military elite in the name of fighting “insurgency.” Not quite long ago, one billion dollars was approved by the National Economic Council for combating insurgency in the north east. This was in spite of the quantum increase in the statutory vote to the uniformed agencies saddled with the prosecution of what was a technically defeated foe in that theatre of conflict
- The one billion dollar was to fight a different type of insurgency that the growing political opposition constitute to the governing political and military elite and nothing else
- In so far as insurgency was concerned, there is the type that prevails everywhere in Nigeria and to which Nigerians have been electing officials at the national, states and local levels to tackle. This insurgency type has not been technically defeated in anyway since May 2015. This insurgency is growing and remains a threat militarily, politically and ideologically
- To defeat this insurgency which is escalating in all parts of Nigeria, it is necessary for the political class to change the narrative of security to the provision of economic opportunity on the short, medium and long term bases for most Nigerians which was why Nigerians voted to remove the military from governance. It is in tandem to Trump’s proclamation that economic security is national security

- In 2014, for whatever reason, the Office of the National Security Adviser compiled and published a national security strategy which sets out to do everything and in the end nothing. The NSS was not based on any security policy. At best, the NSS was based on the defence perspective of the military on security. It was a document that was lacking in coherence and rightly so it is not available for public consumption or reflected in the conduct of the government of the day
- The National Security Strategy was compiled during the regime of President Goodluck Jonathan. The administration was hardly aware of the existence of the NSS. Perhaps, the President was only complying with the advise of the National Security Adviser or keying to what was thought to be the international best practice in the fight against terrorism
- The regime of President Muhammadu Buhari did not seem to notice the NSS. The President's conception of security emanated from his military background. For now, the President is the security because he was a former military officer! This view – that only military people knew security – was explicit in the sentiment that brought him to power. It was within the tradition of security that put military as the be-all and end-all of security.
- Is the military the be-all and end-all of security?
- If the military define security within their job description of defence, how should the political class define security? Should the political class not define security within their job description of governance that encompasses most things beginning with the foundation of security, the economy? Should the political class not follow the security type advocated by Anthony Burke that "security should not be seen as one good among many. Security should be the good that guarantees all others"? Should the Nigerian political class persist in defining security in the context of their difficult experience in the hands of the military as the quid pro quo that security is today? Where is the difference between the political class and the military class in the definition of security? Of the military and political class, who should own security?
- Where is the philosophy of security of the political class elected to provide security since the return of electoral democracy in 1999?

## Conclusion

When one put the Trump America First strategy in the Nigerian context, certain questions comes up: what is consistent in the conducts of governments or administrations since independence, in the name of security or national security, but in particular since security or national security became a staple in officialdom, that in the absence of policy on security or national security, can be equated to a pattern consistent

with most administrations, in the mould of the United States system? Are there governments or administrations actions, in promoting and projecting Nigerianness away from projecting and promoting nationalities that in the absence of a policy could be interpreted as consistent enough to be described as policy? What actions of governments or administrations put the prosperity of Nigerians as priority that has been consistently and could be interpreted as policy even without one? What actions of governments or administrations since independence or since security or national security became the official mantra that advances the interests of Nigerians beyond Nigeria's borders that in the absence of policy could be considered as policy of government?

Therefore security or national security can come in a policy document or in the consistency that exemplified the conduct of successive governments or administrations in certain areas it described as security or national security. Neither the first type nor the second type characterise the Nigerian situation. Indeed in view of the arbitrariness that characterised the Nigerian persons and institutions, it is necessary to have the first type legislated into law by Nigerians. This first type security policy should emanate from (see the link "Stripping" in [adoyionoja.org](http://adoyionoja.org) for my article on "Security Theory Based on Nigeria's History, Experience and Reality") Nigeria's history, experience and reality (HER).

Nigerian political class, by the virtue of the mandate from the Nigerians, own security. This is because Nigerians elected them to provide security. Nigerians elected them to provide the Burke type security. The Burke type security is the "... good that guarantees all others." In other words, security is the umbrella that covers everything. The political class, elected to govern in all facets of the people's life, has the responsibility to provide this security.

The Nigerian variety of political class should emulate their counterpart in America by taking ownership of security. They should begin by providing their security philosophy distinct from the one they were socialised into under the military. This security philosophy must be in tandem with the mandate from the electorate.