

Perspective of Security of Most Nigerians

In sampling the perspectives of security from the military, politicians and intellectuals, it is to discern the thinking of opinion leaders within Nigeria. Most Nigerians do not have independent view of security beyond what they learnt from the practices of the three groups sampled in previous posts. Indeed two out of the three – politicians and intellectuals – drew their knowledge from what the practice the military bequeathed to the country. Beginning with the military, Nigerians of all shades would learn what they know about security from the military whose roles in the polity were two folds.

The first role was that of the institution saddled with the task of defending the territorial borders of the country and aiding civil authority in quelling internal subversion. This defence role exercised by the military falls within section 217 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended. The second role was when the military subverted the constitution by taking over the political leadership of the country in 1966. The process of intervention in government would continue concurrently with few respites until international and domestic developments compelled the military to return power back to the civilian.

Of these two roles, it was the latter that marked them out as the foremost institution that shaped the consciousness of Nigerians to their notion of security. It was a notion of security that defence-inclined. Nigerians would subsequently not know any other view of security except the one the military introduced and socialised them into. As the posts did reveal beginning with the military, politicians and intellectuals, each group was essentially ignorant of the deeper context of security and understood security from their exposure and interest. It was the take of the posts that none of the group had any independent notion of security prior to the intervention of the military and its popularisation especially in the decades beginning from the 1980s when issues of security dominated international and domestic politics.

The military, politicians and intellectuals are Nigerians and their views of security did subsist for other Nigerians. The military had, while in government, socialised Nigerians to the type of security that put them at the helm of affairs. The military's stewardship was characterised by the destruction of civil institutions including family, school, voluntary bodies and the police. The destruction affected the effectiveness of the police which derived from the initial role of the family and school in nurturing young Nigerians.

Nigerians were socialised into the violence that characterise military culture making the police less effective in checking manifestation of discontent that became common in the society. Discontents among Nigerians were the result of military misrule and inability to satisfy the yearnings of the people. The satisfaction of the needs of Nigerians in the short,

medium and long term is security which encompasses every aspects of human endeavour including defence. This import of security was denied Nigerians by military rule's obsession with its professional calling of defence which it sold to Nigerians as security.

In the attempt to beef up police ineffectiveness in managing disorder, the military, in the reckoning of Nigerians, became the first and preferred institution capable of quelling disorder due to its methods. The spate of protests/demonstrations that characterised Nigeria from the mid 1980s provided classical example of the type of intervention the military provided in quelling disorder. The police, the first line of defence in internal security, had by this time lost this position due to poor motivation, training and equipment.

In any such protest or demonstration, the first law enforcement outfit to be deployed into conflict was the regular police whose rating among Nigerians plummeted with every bout of military misrule. When the police failed as they were usually programmed to fail, the mobile police were despatched to the scene. They, unlike the regular police, garnered some respect from Nigerians because of their notoriety in particular demonstrations including the 1989 SAP riot and with students on campuses of tertiary institutions. When the mobile police failed, members of the military with the army in the lead because of their numerical strength and presence when compared with the air force and navy were deployed to finish the job.

The methods of the military differ from those of the police. The police shoot as a last resort and only when their lives were in danger. The army shoot to kill as a first resort. The former chief of army staff, General Victor Malu put this succinctly when he noted that soldiers were not trained to cut off legs. They were trained to cut off heads from necks. This was what represented the restoration of order for Nigerians. This was what security was for Nigerians. The very ploy of staged deployment indicated that by the time the soldiers arrived, the belligerents were tired and ready for truce.

This was the perspective of security that the military socialised Nigerians into knowing in the years they governed Nigeria. It was a defence-inclined security deriving from the role of the military in the security umbrella. Thus was born the perspective of security that begins and ends with the role played by the military. Nigerians are not concerned about the functional difference of the military and the police and the specific role of the military in defence. Nigerians are oblivious of the all encompassing perspective of security which makes security political.

It is this perspective that suffices everywhere in whatever forum. While the military, politicians and intellectuals have since particularised their interest within this security perspective, it is not the same for Nigerians. The intellectual class represented by scholars, media, advocacy and civil society groups should have been in the forefront of championing the cause of Nigerians through disseminating knowledge of the type that liberate the people

from the interest of the military and politician in propagating the prevailing perspective of security. So far, this is not the case.

Polls after polls among students in tertiary institutions revealed that the prevailing security knowledge was derived from the view put forward by the military while in government. Interactions in seminars, workshops and conferences revealed that this view represented the prevailing take on security. Among people on streets, the conduct of the police and military were often compared to determine which was effective in providing security. Nigerians would not associate security with the provision of economic opportunity which is sine qua non to preventing the manifestation of the crisis that would bring the police and military into the public spaces.

The implication of this is that the residual of military rule has come to stay in the body polity as demonstrated by the political class and most Nigerians. The election of President Muhammadu Buhari and the All Progressives Party (APC) by Nigerians was not merely because of the dissatisfaction of Nigerians with President Goodluck Jonathan and the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Muhammadu Buhari was a brand in two respects. One, he was a former military man at the time that Nigerians thought they needed the military's expertise at the highest level to tackle the crisis in the north east. Two, Buhari fought theft in the mid 1980s and theft was back with a vengeance. The revelation since he launched his anti theft campaign revealed that the crisis in the north east had been carefully converted into a cottage industry that paid both the military and political elites.

The election of President Buhari had input from the prevailing security orientation of Nigerians. It was owing to the seeming inability to address the crisis in the north east, a fact attributed to the inexperience of the former President on security. This was in spite of the fact that the former President was advised by his chief of defence staff represented by all the services chief. In electing President Buhari, it was to bring back the effectiveness of the military, in some form, in bringing this security.

Again, the crisis in the north east revealed the reality that the military, having tasted political power and all that it entailed, would have to be accommodated in some form, if there should be political stability in Nigeria. There are various types of accommodation in for instance Turkey prior to the coming to power of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Pakistan where the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) make and unmake governments and Myanmar where the military have seats in the national assembly. For the generation of Nigerians that enlisted into the army, air force and navy when military rule was at its height the talk of subordinating themselves to civilian political control mask their disappointment. Most had enlisted in the hope of playing political role of some form. Most did not enlist because they were interested in defending the country. I have alluded to what I called a blind trade off between the political and military classes evident in the management of the crisis in the north

east. The trade off involved the political class acquiescing to the military managing security and security monies (and this is huge as evident from the anti theft revelations of the present administration) leaving the political class to manage other affairs. This trade off represented a seeming recipe for stability for the two contending 'political' groups.

Nigerians are the losers as far as this security orientation continues. Nigerians do not see anything wrong in the prevailing security knowledge and practice since this was all they knew about security. To this extent Nigerians saw nothing wrong with the appropriation of resources, by the military and political classes, in the name of security.