

Security Perspective from the Military Angle

Recall that in the concluding part of the last post, we noted that there were several perspectives of security out there in the public domain. We posited that we would examine these perspectives beginning from the beginning in the order we posted. In today's submission, we will take the military perspective. It was the pioneering, dominant and official perspective of security in Nigeria.

I said it was the pioneering because until the military's intervention in shaping the thoughts of Nigerians on security or their version of defence inclined security, security was a passing word used by Nigerians in various ways. Security did not connote the value attached to it now. I said it was the dominant perspective because all over the world the protection of the state was the focus of security. The military was the one institution that insulated the state against danger and gave effect to power. It was the official perspective because security involves statecraft worldwide. In the Nigeria version popularised by the military, their limited exposure and the peculiarity of their environment changed the context of security's focus. Thus everyone everywhere and in everything thought like the military.

Security was constructed by military rule and although military rule began early in Nigeria's independence, it was not until the mid 1980s when it became vicious and rapacious. Increasingly security became a buzzword in official Nigeria. The regime of General Ibrahim Babangida began the socialisation of Nigerians into their version of security. Subsequent regimes including General Abacha consolidated the currency of security in the discourse of Nigerians. Associated with Nigeria's domestic development were the series of changes that began with the end of the Cold War, the post Cold War worlds, the War on Terror and the strategic benefits derivable for countries who enlisted into the global War on Terror.

From the Nigerian standpoint therefore security was borne of the domestic development associated with the failure of the military in governance, the war of attrition that developed within the military institution for power and the rising anti military/authoritarian global environment which affected the hold of the regimes in power. The military's role in the security structure, that of defence, became the preferred focus of security as they played the role of government and the professional institution charged with protecting the state. Regime security featured prominently as security single focus.

The military began the process of popularising and socialising Nigerians into their world of security. It was a process conceived in their ignorance and in their limited role within the umbrella called security. If security was the political field that most theories particularly constructivists claimed it was, the limitation of the military in appreciating this was evident in their mistaking defence for security. Nigerians including the military that claimed expertise in the field of security knew no better. This was because the realm of security as shaped by the

histories of the western world and thus contained in security theories, concepts, institutions and issues developed before, during and after the Cold War was outside Nigeria's history.

Security as presently constituted and constructed emanated from Western culture and thus the theories, concepts, institutions and issues. Beginning from strategic studies which dealt strictly with military and allied matters as it concerned war to security studies which incorporated civilianisation, Nigeria was on the periphery of this development. Nigeria, a British creation, emerged only after the creation of the institution of security. Indeed the creation of Nigeria derived from British security need. Even in matters of strategy that seemingly concerned the Nigerian military, Nigeria had never been threatened by its neighbour(s) as was the west in time past.

So, what is the basis of the military's claim of superior knowledge of security? The first derived from the role the military play in the dominant security narrative deriving from the tenets of realism. Security, in the tradition of the west, was about power, fear and anarchy. This was especially the case in the arena of international politics. The contest among states on the international scene did not derive from the failure of governance at the domestic scene. It was the result of the success of domestic governance engendering the need to advance and protect national interest in different spheres of the globe.

Nigeria did not have this enabling environment. The Nigerian military, either knowingly or unknowingly, channel the absence of this context into the internal situation of Nigeria. Security in Nigeria was generated by the failure of governance and thus governance oriented. It emerged from the gross disparity between demand and supply among Nigerians. It was this absence of opportunity for Nigerians in all spheres beginning with the economic sphere that triggered the conflict between nationalities with which the military became preoccupied with following the inability of the police to deal with the situation. This was what the military subsequently labelled as insecurity.

Restoring order became the priority of security. Insecurity could not be addressed using law enforcement approach. The manifestation of insecurity had decidedly taken a violent approach defying law enforcement and thus police approach. This was the type of security that the military's practice socialised and popularised Nigerians into knowing. It was a practice that aimed to restore the primacy of the state not in solving the reason for insecurity. It was to suppress dissent using the military's strong arm tactics following the failure of police approach.

The military was as ignorant about security as most Nigerians. The military learnt security on the job. On enlisting into the services their knowledge of security and the difference between security and defence was rudimentary. The aspect of security they learnt was defence which was the role they played in the complex called security. Even when they were exposed to

"security", it was the type associated with their task of defence. However, in usurping power and in distorting governance for several years, their professional instinct came to the front burner as they attempted to survive the struggle for power within the military and the dissatisfaction of Nigerians with their stewardship. From the late 1980s onward, the military became a Frankenstein Monster. Nigerians enrolling into the officer corps did so for the wrong reasons as their motivation was as varied as the crisis of the post colonial state in Nigeria.

The military's most abiding legacy was the underdevelopment and destruction of institutions. One such institution was the police. The police role in law enforcement was complemented by the role of other institutions including the family, church/mosque, school, voluntary organisation and the work place. All these were affected by military misrule which translated into a harden Nigerian impossible to police by the regular police. As conflicts intensified in the society and as police legitimacy were eroded by poor remuneration, poor housing, outdated equipment and logistics, the commensurate result was the poor performance of the police in their occupation of maintaining law and order.

An example of the declining influence of the police in conflict containment will suffice to drive home the point. In conflict situation, the normal deployment procedure was to first to send the regular police who were often dishevelled, ill motivated, ill equipped and thus lacking in confidence. The belligerents were emboldened in their agitation since they knew the regular police cannot contain them. The second set to be sent into the conflict area were the mobile police who had distinguished themselves in numerous riots situations all over the country. They earned some respect among Nigerians but overall they were considered as part of the police.

The third group to be sent into the conflict situation were members of the military. The choice of the service to be deployed was contingent on the type available within the conflict area. It could be the army, navy or air force. Of the three services, the army had gained the most notoriety among Nigerians. It was by far the most numerous and the most visible in most acts of illegality including violating the constitution and meting out vicious treatment to members of the public. The appearance of the troops changed the psychology of the unruly crowd. At this stage in the conflict, the belligerents were almost certainly tired. The troops will fire into the crowd killing and injuring a couple persons in the process and the crowd dispersed.

Nigerians will cheer members of the military for their decisiveness and deride the police for their cowardice. Nigerians knowledge was not any better in the matters of the containment of conflict. Not only were the conflicting parties tired by the time the armed forces were deployed to the conflict area. The rules of engagement of the police and the armed forces differed. The police were not trained to kill. The police kill only when their lives were at risk.

The armed forces, as General Victor Malu once noted, were not trained to cut off legs or hands. They were trained to chop off heads from necks. Military rule not only destroyed the enabling environment for the functioning of the police. Military rule made Nigerians violent to the extent that they respected violence which was what the military was trained to perpetrate. It was also the genesis of joint military-police patrol all over the place that was the hallmark of law enforcement in Nigeria.

This was one of the practices of the armed forces that etched their type of security into the Nigerian psyche. There were several of these practices in the course of several years of military rule. These practices negated the independent appreciation of security not only for the members of the armed forces but for the rest of Nigerians.

This was the defence spring from which Nigerians learnt security. It was a poison spring that served the interest of the military in government. This spring harmed Nigeria's interest throughout military rule. This poison spring is now serving their interest out of government. It is serving their interest because the political class who replaced the military in 1999 like the rest of Nigerians did not know much about security. The socialisation of the political class under the military type defence inclined security developed their interest into promoting a security type that safeguards their hold on power. This, too, is no doubt harming the interest of Nigerians as exemplified by the persistence of crisis and conflict since 1999.