

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: CONSIDERING THE MORAL RESOURCES OF TRUST AMONG THE ETHNIC GROUPS

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Abstract

Democracy is often epitomized with forms of differences in which it spells ambiguity in the national security. It varies from state to state with its private, public and national interest. In respect to this, the idea of national interest has been a subject of criticism on the imperative of what actually defines it as a political process in Nigeria. In what way could it be regarded as a national security? What constitutes the idea of a national security by bearing in mind the fragmented nature of Nigeria state with its much ethnic divides? The sum of the interests of the several members of ethnic groups who compose it have different agenda of the national security. So, the finding of this paper corroborates the thesis that the symbol of national security is nothing but a stimulus to semantic confusion and that, if used without specifications, it leaves room for more confusion in Nigeria's democracy. There are so many ethnic groups in Nigeria with different values of interests. So, it is this way that different individual ethnic group are capable of defining what that interest is. It is in this perspective that any notion of a public interest is perhaps bogus; the interests of the community are at best with the gross benefit of all others who subscribe to it. The interest is very beneficial to those who want it. So, this paper examines the reality of genuine national security interest in Nigeria by bearing in mind its position of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious nature. Our share in private ethnic interest interfaces with the genuine national security interest. This invariably, leads into crises in Nigeria. The tension for political control and demands for more open political communities has been the problem of genuine national security in Nigeria. Thus, it is on a related note, that we will come to the conclusion by saying that any forms of national security must be accompanied with the general approach of creating values in the whole society. It will adopt the general system of inclusion, collaboration, collectiveness and reciprocity in the national constitution.

Keywords: National Security, National Integration, Democracy, Ethnic Group and National Interest.

Introduction

The term national security is an ambiguous symbol. It has been a subject to growing criticism. Critics have suggested not only that politicians are prone to using such term cynically, but also that the concept itself may simply not stand up to the reality of the public interests. The principal advocates of such a view have subscribed to the use of utilitarian doctrine of the greatest good for the greatest number in settling such disputes about the common good and national interest. But quintessentially, this situation is still pending in the political democracy in Nigeria. The notion of public interest is still very bogus, the interests of the community is still interfacing with the national interest. They are in juxtaposition to each other, in spite of the general principles of democratic process in Nigeria. Thus, it is under this consideration that Neher (ed.) by Simon (2001) asserts that:

Citizen participation is counter piece of democracy, but participation can be defined in numerous ways by election groupings, or indirect citizen impact on policymakers. Democracy requires that people have

a say in managing their political affairs, or at least in choosing those who do the managing (Neher (ed.) by Simon, 2001:167)¹.

This paper is highly to interject on the system of national security or what could stand out as a genuine public policy, that will bring the genuine leadership capital in Nigeria.

So, it is conceivable that analysis of our national security interest will then determine the genuine public policy. It may mean the same thing to different people in the country. A genuine national security interest must be altruistic. It emphasizes that the national policy must be for the common good. It is under this trajectory that a national policy must be determined to focus their attention on more inclusive interest of the whole in the political community.

Today, the alternative to a policy of the national interest to which people refer is of a different character. In Nigeria-sovereignty, the term national security has been scrutinized with particular care of not purely national interest, because of its non-conformity with the wider range of many ethnic leadership. This is because; national posture of public policy in Nigeria is usually trivialized in the pluralistic society of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious variables. It may be interpreted to mean different things to different ethnic groups.

In a more comprehensive interpretation, this work is set to determine the actual concept of a genuine national security in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the idea is not well spelt out on the ground of modern pluralist theorists, who view politics in terms of competitive stance between various ethnic groups and interests. They are organized group with “rational choice” or “public choice” in self-interested behaviour. Perhaps, this amount to why there is incessant political strife and social conflict in Nigeria. This interpretation reveals the existence of shared interests and the importance of collective action. This is why this paper challenges the bogus semantic confusion arising from the concept of national security. The notion of national security or interest can only be dispensed with altogether if there is reason to believe that the pursuit of self-interest genuinely works to the benefit of at least the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’ in society. Thus, it is in this light that Heywood (1994) asserts that:

In reality, there are persuasive reasons for believing that the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest tends ultimately to be self-defeating and think a society guided by private interests alone is doomed to frustration and unhappiness².

Something must guide them to live in mutual reciprocity and the idea of public goods, then must be followed in line with the principles of genuine democracy which brings a proper acceptance of a national integration as a systematic process of finding a value or set of values basic to the evolution of an overlapping consensus to ensure a functional, cohesive society in midst of extant pluralism.

Exploring the Power of National Security in Nigeria: The Trajectory of Ethnic Interest

There is drawback to the concept of national interest, and to be more specific by the national security interest. It is not surprising that this should be so in Nigeria, where there is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Today, any reference to the pursuit of security in Nigeria is to bring the variants of interpretations. In Nigeria, for security to gain ground as a prescribed term, it needs to be scrutinized with particular care of interest from the citizens. They may not have precise meaning at all. Thus, while appearing to offer guidance and a basis for

¹Naher, C.D., “Democracy, Human Rights, and Security in Asia” In *The Many Faces of Asia Security*, edited by Simon (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 167.

²Haywood, A., *Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994), 245.

broad consensus, they may be permitting everyone to label whatever policy he/she favours with an attractive and possibly deceptive name.

In a very vague and general way, 'national interest' does suggest a direction of policy which can be distinguish from several others which may present themselves as alternatives. It indicates that the policy is designed to promote demands which are ascribed to the nation rather than to individuals, sub-national groups or mankind as a whole. It emphasizes that the policy subordinates other interests to those of the nation. But beyond this, it has very little meaning, because it usually has a bogus meaning. This apt of descriptive analysis is corroborated by Haywood (1994) who asserts that:

the 'totalitarian democracies' which developed under fascist dictators such as Mossolini and Hitler, in which the democratic credentials of the regime were based upon the claim that 'the leaders', and the leader don, articulated the genuine interests of people³.

Hence, it is under this guess, that the fascist leaders like Hitler identified the true democratic system as absolute dictatorship. So, in reality there is no viable system that will conform or articulate the genuine public interest very properly. In short, there are no adequate or precise definitions of public interest that will stand as a genuine national security interest.

In Nigeria as a result of several social change dynamics, religious orientations and ethnic traditional beliefs and political revelries, a new set of shared norms and values appears to be emerging as a national interest, while at the same time a greater emphasis on local concerns is pulling these same societies inward towards retaining their ethnic traditional values. So, it is on a related note that in Nigeria and elsewhere in history, the demand for a policy of national security is primarily normative in character. It is to indicate the actual policy of a nation but due to the congruent of its fragmentations in the statehood, it has no moral best or the course of action to fathom a unifying national interest that will consolidate the country into having genuine national security interest. Thus, under this spell, attention should be drawn to an assertion that is implicit if not explicit in most appeals for a policy guided by national security. It is literally, that such appeals usually assume that nations have made security their goal except when idealism or utopianism of their leaders has led them to stray from the traditional path. If such conformity of behaviour actually existed, it would be proper to infer that a country deviating from the established pattern of conduct would risk being penalized. The trouble with the contentions in Nigeria is as a result of differences in values of different religiosity, culture and language among the people. There are different cultural hegemony in Nigeria. It is in this regard, that the term 'security' covers a range of goals so wide that highly divergent policies can be interpreted as policies of security.

Security points to some degree of protections of values previously acquired, but here in Nigeria, it is purely a young state in democracy which has not yet fully established on the reality of national interest. From a realist perspective, Nigeria is still a young state of post colonial administration by trying to catch up with the security of nationhood. It is still battling with the realism of modernity, in its reorganization of institutions and social conditions of states in Africa. For instance, liberal scholars such as Weiner (1967) involve the following principles:

It incorporates territorial integration, value integration, elite-mass integration and integrative behavior. It refers to ways of cementing the component parts into one. Institutionalization however refers to creating structures through which the different parts can relate to each other, employ the same rules to solve common problems and achieve

³Haywood, A., *Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994), 245.

collective objectives. It refers to the broad multi-dimensional problem of creating communities together⁴.

More so, in this connection, Eze (2012) asserts that:

The legitimacy of the state is linked to its capacity to present itself as a provider of necessary public good and more importantly, a neutral arbiter that guarantees the security of all sections of the society. Tribalism and manipulation of religious sentiments and regionalism are pushed forward as explanations for unequal development⁵ (p.79).

As Nigerians prepared for independence, in 1960, the citizens had no other alternative than to resort to their faith in the union of a nation state. They felt the need to merge, irrespective of their ethnic, religious, cultural and political differences. Constitutionally, they agreed to live together as a nation, but still had not fully been committed to build a country of a national interest. When the state is generally perceived as serving particular interest of one group, it starts losing its legitimacy, and indeed, its authority. As capacity declines, fear of uncertainty increases to an extent that citizens resort to other levels of solidarity viz religious, ethnic, regional and so on, with a view of getting guaranteed security. The result, therefore, is the perennial social tension, political instability and change that have not been accompanied with progress. This greatly brought an in-depth schism in the national polity to the idea of disintegration from the genuine national interest. It is in this regard, that one ethnic group sees the other as rival that must be ousted, by all means. This has greatly hampered the system of national integration in our polity.

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of national integration is very necessary for a strong viable nationhood. However, the concept has been replaced with the concept of national segregation, in which each group faces each other in mutual suspicion, struggles for supremacy as rivals in contest rather than partners in progress. The nature of the struggle among the groups determines the level of political stability and the praxis of national interest in the country.

The Ambiguities of State Power in Nigeria

The tension between intensifications of social control and demands for more open political communities has recurred while state-building has become the problem of modernity in Nigeria due to the adverse effects of its reorganization of institutions and social conditions of state in Africa. The state actually, is the fourth dimensional factors of political existence in Nigeria. The state is the pivotal structure of leadership capital which necessitates the inclusion of a new order in the political affairs of the African states at independence. It is a new leadership structure which brought changes in political, ethical, social and a new economics system in Africa. In Nigeria, the state at early post-colonial era is more concerned with the phenomenal system of exclusion of the ethnic political relevance. Some regional states are more concerned than others with plight of the systematically excluded, indicating that national responses to the tension within modernity vary considerably. Some states take role in nation-building more than the others in capitalizing into the principles of national security interest and bring in their best for social and political conformity to the national interest. Most states are incapable of suppressing the demands that they should dismantle pernicious systems of exclusion, though their power to thwart aspirations for social change should not be underestimated. The state remains the principal site on which the conflict between efforts to monopolise the control of significant sources and opportunities and struggles to create less exclusionary political communities are worked out. Thus, it is on a related note, that Wheeler

⁴Weiner, M. "Political Integration and Political Development". In *Political Modernization*, edited by W. Claude. (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1967), 156.

⁵Eze, C.O., Ethnic-Religious Conflict and the Travails of National Integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *RC Canadian Social Science* 8:79-85. Web, 2012.

opined that “most states make positive contribution to resolving the tensions within modernity is a keenly contested issue”⁶ (Wheeler, 1996:44). Wheeler, therefore, is of the view that “states are primarily concerned with accumulating power, increasing the surveillance of society, controlling challengers and outmaneuvering adversaries”⁷ (MacMillan and Linklater, 1995:5).

The state in any society is an instrument of power and Hegel under the realm of political philosophy offers the most elaborate defense of the achievement of the modern state while recognizing the depth of these ambiguities. Revolutionary terror and forces of reaction had found expression in modern societies. The weaknesses in Hegel’s position were exposed by the young Hegelians and especially by Marx. They welcome the extension of civil, political and religious freedoms within the modern state. Marx’s famous critique of Hegel’s political philosophy stressed the failure of the modern state to satisfy the basic material needs of the subordinate classes. Marx’s project was towards ending the exploitation of the proletariat and to promoting greater cosmopolitanism. His critique of the capitalist state was combined with a progressivist interpretation of the future socialist state which failed to realize the potential conflict between those two social objectives. Hegel’s attempt to reveal that the modern citizen ought to feel at home in the world, and Marx’s proposed remedy for the forms of alienation and exploitation which dashed human aspirations to live a free life, failed to recognize the ethical limitations of the modern form of political community.

It is not just about the modern state structure in which Marx elucidated, but there are many other reasons for this failure of national security interest in Nigeria. To mention a few of more important ones; Nigeria did not yet acquire the critical mass of essential human capital or technological and management expertise to plan a good national policy that will harmonize the interest of genuine democracy in Nigeria. Secondly, the Nigeria’s early policy goal was fully planned and implemented by outside interests, and this has led to the causes of many social conflicts in Nigeria. Surprisingly, it is as a result of this that there are systems of exclusionism in Nigeria. The colonial state structure recreates a new set of norms in African states. It led to the reorganization of institutions and social condition of state in Africa. It destroyed the existing pre-colonial African states with new structure of governance and system of exclusionism in post colonial administration. The quest for regional interest has led to the deepening of national rivalries and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The incidences of national rivalries have created a huge gap in formulating a genuine national security interest in Nigeria.

The institutional structures of Nigeria federalism are in juxtaposition with the traditional African institutions, and this has led to the decay of the present democratic federal states structures in Nigeria. This has been expressed by Asike, thus:

In country after country, efforts to restructure political systems along democratic lines quickly found themselves entangled in power struggles as incumbent elites struggled to preserve what they could of their privileges. Even in those cases where autocratic incumbents were dislodged in the initial wave of change, ensuing struggles demonstrated clearly that there was little consensus on how power should be distributed or on the democratic processes contesting it. Democracy was not to come easily in Africa⁸ (Asike, 2014: 74).

⁶Wheeler, N., *Guardian Angel or Global Gangster? A Review of the Ethical Claims of International Society. (Political Studies, 1996), 44.*

⁷MacMillan, J. and Linklater, A. (eds). *Boundaries in Question: New Directions in International Relations*(London: Pinter, 1995), 5.

⁸Asike, J.C., *Social Change and Crises of Religious Politics in Africa: A Critical Review of Christian and Moslem Relations in Nigeria* (Doctoral Dissertation). (USA: Pro Quest, 2014), 74.

Critically observed with these political scenarios in Nigeria, it is inevitable that the system in place at present does not control the behavior of the Nigerian political elites, who are corrupt and are not committed to the unification of the country in the oval section of “National Security Interest”. The political elites are not altruistic in carrying the goal of the national interest. Rather, they are more concerned to personal and sometimes in the realism of their ethno-religious interest.

Patterns of Ethnic and National Conflict

The status of ethical universalism in the light of these emphases upon the importance of respect for difference is one of the central issues in the cause of ethnic and national security divides in Nigeria. Given the normative preferences which have already expressed earlier in this work, the present philosophical inquiry attests to the prospects for achieving progress towards higher level of ethnic national integration in Nigeria.

It is well known that we are not witnessing a united or unique nation in Nigeria and at their core of interest; there are much ethnic and national conflicts between competing groups constituting political, economic and religious battle between rival visions of freedom and equality. Must your group be equal to mine? Is my group’s freedom a threat to yours? When such conflicts do occur, they manifest themselves in a number of different ways. Each relies to varying degrees on the-state to limit some group’s freedom and equality, and each involves varying level of violence.

One manifestation of such conflict is the system of exclusion as a formal way of national security interest, whereby certain groups are not granted full political rights by the dominant ethnic group. Perhaps, this has brought many political unrest in many nations of the world, like, the former Soviet Union with the Estonia and Latvia, and more so, in Nigeria where there is many ethnic rivalries on the nature of political, economic and religious divides.

The critical view on this is the importance of globalization which creates new forms of hegemonic power which threaten cultural differences. Globalization helps in unifying the world into one common boundary of national security interest. The progressive effect of globalization was so pronounced in the writings of Kant and Marx. Both maintained that the dominant patterns of economic change made it possible for human beings to create new forms of universal co-operation. With this in mind, it is necessary to build on the approaches taken by Kant and Marx by arguing that the strategic logic of globalization erodes traditional conceptions of community and reduce the moral significance of national ethnic differences or boundaries. It creates the unprecedented values for the generality of the society. To express this really, Kant directed the liberal notions of freedom and equality which had emerged in response to the growth of state power against political domination and inter-state violence.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this paper offers an alternative interpretation to the semantic confusion arising from the national security interest in Nigeria. It negates the political and cultural elite’s unwillingness to uphold Nigeria’s tradition of unity in diversity. The author as I am, subscribe to the principle of true federalism as an alternative political process that will suppress the numerous political problems in Nigeria.

The picture scarcely changes when examining the issue of identity, ethnicity, and religion in the institutional reorganization of the Nigeria state. The clarification about identity, ethnicity and religion remains a burning issue in the debate about the solutions occurring from the examinations of Nigeria’s existential ontology into traditions, values, pathos and ethos of the peoples, social conditions of states, economic resources, the geo-political compartmentalization of power-sharing and all other forms of social change. These are problems in Nigeria.

Perhaps, this will ameliorate some of the difficult problems of social and political intercourse, which put Nigeria into incessant political strife that affect its national security interest. Generally, if Nigeria is to remain, then it is important that a viable methodology is put in place to co-habit all the elements of social transformations in the society. A transformation that will codify all the various differences into one group of nation called Nigeria. So, this paper stands to affirm the political integrity of true federalism as a panacea for national integration and genuine democracy in Nigeria. It will leap out to substitute the lapses in the political leadership capital, economic significance of development in Nigeria, political and economic relationship among members in the state, formulation and evaluation of genuine public policy, which will be the driven force of unity in diversity in Nigeria. It is the concept of public policy that will bridge the gap between the public and private interest.

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