

Politics and the Illusion of Peace: the dynamics and challenges of Security in Africa in 21st century – A Classical Case of Nigeria

Why has peace, security and development remained too elusive to African states? Why has the history of Africa remained that of conflict, poverty, underdevelopment, joblessness in the mist of plenty? Where did we get it all wrong; is our problem from within? Is the African situation too peculiar that it defiles all solutions? Where is the Africa in us? Is their hope for the future? If the current violent trends in Africa continue, there may be no hope for my beloved continent, Africa. Being an optimist, I am of the view that the beginning of a new day is in sight for my continent; that Africa will surely chart a new course. However, it's not yet *uhuru* for the renaissance Africa of our founding fathers; the likes of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, the foremost nationalist from Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwe and the great patriot and World Hero of Social Justice, Julius Nyerere from Tanzania, among others.

Political Actors in Africa, particularly my country Nigeria ideally would expect that in gatherings like this, we Africans should portray the larger continent of in good light even when the obvious is crystal clear, but I guess being more realistic would make me more patriotic Nigerian and indeed an African at heart. Point blank, Africa's past certainly exerts a destructive influence. The colonial legacy crafted principally by United Kingdom and France is one of arbitrary borders that have sustained ethnic divisions and conflict. Having said this though, it's my submission that post independent Africa states should no longer hold Europe responsible for our problems. Fifty years is enough to repair any damages done to our continent and our collective psyche or like I pointed out chart a new course.

This paper is not necessarily aimed or concerned with suggestions of any form of involvement of external actors to bringing about sustainable peace and security in Africa; rarely has it worked or at best palliative, but it seeks to expose the flaws of African political actors towards building or institutionalizing peace and security in the continent. It will hopefully suggest ways for enduring peace in a continent with long history of conflict; which among other factors could include exchange of ideas with our European counterparts. In many instances, Nigeria, a country in West Africa will be used to elaborate on certain core issues raised.

Nigeria, indeed African continent has least two stories: that of all that is bad, destructive and retrogressive and that of a resourceful continent with people who has hope and purposeful persistence spirit. Realistically, Nigeria is on the verge of collapse. A collapse practically engineered and constantly propelled from within particularly by our retired military generals many of whom has metamorphosed to Political Generals. They neither think nor act in the context of 'Nigeria Project' but found solace in thinking in the context of himself, children, including those unborn and of course his cronies; how best to position them for an Eldorado future at the expense of over 150 million other Nigerians who has been neglected, relegated, abused, brutalized, defenseless, frustrated and faced with a blurred future even in the face of abundant natural resources. What our leaders seems to forget or ignore easily is the fact there has never been a period in history that we have had a condition of peace and security in a world or society of extreme rich and extreme poor. The best of both worlds cannot exist together; hence the precarious stability of the Nigerian state.

Niger Delta youths in the south-southern Nigeria since the beginning of the 21st century have been very restive owing to complete neglect of the region by the successive government; yet more than 95% of Nigeria revenue comes from that region. The region has been subjected to all known forms of environmental cruelty by oil companies operating in that region particularly Shell Oil Development Corporation with origins in The Netherlands, while the Nigerian government watched like a sleeping giant or at best make some pronouncement that doesn't go beyond policy formulation. What use is a policy without adequate measures or framework for its implementation? While some activists in the region like Ken Saro Wiwa and the famous Ogoni Nine were brutally murdered in 1995 in the process of asking for better representation in government, matched with rapid development of the region, the later youths of the Niger Delta took to arms to challenge the government, and by extension putting the peace and security of the nation in jeopardy.

No sane mind will deny or dispute the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with Nigeria leadership. Put simply, the system has failed and I stand to be corrected. Nigeria leaders have failed to adhere to clarion call for accountability and transparency in leadership. More fundamentally, security of lives and property which remains a cardinal function of any government has been relegated to the background while murderers and suicide bombers has continuously has field day , carrying out senseless killings and bombing since the beginning of the 21st century. Politics in Africa and more specifically to Nigeria remains a do-or-die affair in

the words of Nigeria former President, Olusegun Obasanjo or a question of winner-takes-all while millions of Nigerians continuously dream of a near-Eldorado country where the welfare of the people becomes the priority of the government; not just a prerogative of the political actors. Alas!, Nigerians have waited for decades and still living with the illusion of development, of sustainable peace and security.

There is an adage in south eastern Nigeria which says, *igaghi n'ama nwata ura, na-asi ya mechie onu*, translated to mean, you can be slapping a [wo] man and at the same time, asking him or her to keep quite. He will at least cry or retaliate with a near-proportionate slap. 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty line in the mist of abundant natural resources. Many, particularly the youths have gotten tired of joblessness and the '*suffering and smiling*' life style the leadership of the state subjected them to. To them, it is now or never. The same can also be said of many other African states particularly in the Greater Horn of Africa where the youths in a well-coordinated scheme get involved in piracy as a means of survival. While kidnapping and hijacking of ship and its crews should not be condoned since it defiles all forms of known civility and strains relations with countries of Europe and Asia, the hopeless condition of the youths, a situation caused and engineered from within partly gave rise to these barbarity. Nobody will want to live by the gun since most that did were also felled by the gun.

The emergence of the various militant groups that has threatened the security and peace of the Nigerian state remains a spontaneous reaction of a long term grievances of the people who live in the same country with their rich *polithieftians* while many Nigerians in the northern part of the country for example still compete for space in streams for drinking water. More others in the South in the words of the late Ken Saro Wiwa, a Niger Delta Right activist live on 'borrowed time'. Nigeria no doubt has become a safe haven for militant groups made up of youths clamoring rather rebelliously for change. The youths I must point out are products of deplorable condition created by the Nigerian states under the leadership of 99% recycled politicians that have caused more harm than good to the country. A condition that has never allowed positive change that can transform the lives of millions of Nigerians in the Southern part of Nigeria or the lives of my brothers and sisters in the Northern part of the country; not the life of the political leaders in governments and their sycophants, praise singers, among others. To this must be added the 'contractors' in Abuja who has made the seat of power and the National Assembly where laws ought to be made a "Bargaining Avenue". These groups of people knows no poverty even though, many of them were born into poverty. So much for luck and opportunity!

In the Niger Delta part of Nigeria, we have had series of militant groups notably Niger Delta Volunteer Force and the most notorious Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) that has consistently threatened security and peace of the nation. Among their demands is practice of true federalism which among other things can guarantee the region's better share of the oil resources housed in that region– the oil that has been more of source of pain to an average Niger Deltan. For those that bought the idea that militancy in the Niger delta has ended, that kidnapping of oil expatriates workers which metamorphosed to a more general and well-coordinated gang of kidnappers across the length and breadth of Southern Nigeria has been completely halted, except the Nigerian state addresses the core issues of neglect, underdevelopment, conflict and stop criminalizing the state, a characteristics also shared by many African states, we might need to have a rethink.

The relative peace that was witnessed in Nigeria prior to the *boko haram* insurgency is principally the result of the Amnesty programme initiated by the late president, Musa Yardua; a program aimed at luring the militants out from their camps and reintegrating them into the mainstream Nigerian society while also providing them with some vocational training. While we remained hopeful of a more peaceful country owing to that initiative, we were still very skeptical of the situation. Many factors were responsible for this skepticism.

Like Neville Chamberlain of Britain who was convinced that World War II had been averted at the 1938 Munich Agreement, Nigerian political actors said “peace at last” following the Amnesty Program but the October 1st 2010 independent day bomb blast allegedly carried out by MEND shattered that hope. This time around, the battle has moved from shooting and bombing of oil installations and of course kidnapping in the Niger Delta and by extension the whole of Southern Nigeria to Abuja, the seat of power.

By this time, the *Boko Haram* Sect has gone deep in destabilizing the northern states with series of killings and bomb attacks. They seemed unstoppable and ready for war and even till date, they are still threatening fire and bricks against the Nigerian state.

Another stage in attack against the Nigerian state has begun. Another reason while peace and security will remain in the rhyme of utopia has been launched. Nigeria is indeed sitting on a time bomb.

Almost when we are coming to terms with bombing in Abuja in a military barracks that killed many in January 2011, two separate suicide bombers attacked first the Nigerian Police Headquarters on June 16th and United Nations building in Nigeria on 26th August, 2011. Lives were lost in those barbaric acts. Also, what now seems like a tradition in the middle belt of Nigeria continued; Fulani Herdsmen struck in Jos, hacked over forty to death, including a family of eight with six children. Apparently, there is no end in sight yet for the *ethnic-cum-religious-cum political* violence in Nigeria. Nigeria has indeed seen it all: MEND and *boko haram* suicide attacks and ‘murder at midnight’ in Jos.

What has prompted the emergence of various militants groups or promoted hatred among ethnic groups remains like I said a classic case of long period of abuse, neglect, structural injustices that put majority of the people below poverty line. Secondly is the high emphasis on ethnic differences instead of unity which has perverted the minds of the people and make them turn against each other, like the case of persistence Jos killings. It is pertinent to note here that these insurgency groups also have sponsors who are faceless politicians and who by all standard profit from the disintegration process. They are bent on plunging the country further into irredeemable condition for their own selfish ends.

If one is to critically assess the *modus operandi* of the *boko haram* Islamic sect for example, it is obvious that their mission is not necessarily to ban western education in the Northern part of Nigeria as most international media would want us to believe. For emphasis, many members of *Boko haram* have gotten the best of western education. Western education has been rooted in Nigeria and would remain indispensable for our economic and socio-political development. The bombing of Nigeria Police Headquarters in Abuja and that of UN building from my own assessment is both symbolic and strategic. It’s an attempt to humiliate the leadership of Nigeria in the international community and perhaps draw further the attention of the world to the true Nigeria situation; not the blissful Nigeria our leaders will speak of in international gatherings. The persistence Jos killing for example and the revolt from the Niger Delta typifies the continuous citizenship consternation in a country that refuses to address salient issues of neglect

by political leaders, ethnic divide, resources control and ownership. Ironically and quite regrettably, both the government and the insurgency groups seemingly are all filled with illusion of peace and security achieved by violence means.

In all ramifications, I condemn the actions of the masterminds of the bomb explosion across the length and breadth of Nigeria. The continuous Jos killing is condemnable in all respects. Even in the face of hopelessness, taking innocent lives and getting involved in seemingly terrorist acts is heinous and cannot be condoned in any civilized society. It is barbaric and runs contrary to ideas of modern society; including the international legal instruments of the United Nations. Also, it will worsen the already appalling security of lives and property.

Fundamentally and more constructively, it is my postulation here that what Nigeria, indeed Africa lack in our heterogeneous nature, we can make up in our oneness, brotherliness and unity in diversity typified in the concept of *Ubuntu* (a Swahili word from Southern Africa). Desmond Tutu, 1984 Peace Laureate best captures the whole meaning of *Ubutu* in the following words:-.

Ubutu is very difficult to render in western language. It speaks to very sense of being human... it also means that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up in theirs; we belong to a bundle of life. We say a person is a person through other people. I am human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with *Ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she belongs to a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured and oppressed, or treated as if they were less than what or who they are. (Gaya {ed.}: *In Introduction to Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa: A Reader*, p. 26):

No doubt, I dare say that *Ubuntu* is more unifying than even the idea of common identity or homogeneity which remains one of the reasons for stable peace in Europe. It emboldens peace, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual development. It is based on the principle of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples and communities (ibid.p.27). In practical terms, *Ubuntu* is all about reconciliation and peace building in divided societies; almost or equivalent to the principle of peaceful negotiation or peace diplomacy that has helped European states to sustain their peaceful coexistence in spite of their internal

challenges. African leaders and people must imbibe the *Ubuntu* spirit before one can speak in peace and security terms in Africa. That *Ubuntu* spirit is the Africa in us.

No doubt, African conflicts which remains the greatest threat to our security and peace is not beyond our political actors' capacity to prevent or at least manage. It doesn't necessarily require an European or American intervention if only our leaders apply critical reasoning and sound judgment in their actions as political actors in their respective states. The question we should always ask is, how did Europe emerge with formidable democratic framework and stable peace even after the ruins of Second World War? African states and leaders should focus on people oriented policies; give the lives of the people a new meaning and chart a new course for African development. There and then, as far I know, there won't be any *boko haram* bomb attack or any ethnic cleansing by the Fulanis, the Hausas or the Niger Deltans taking their destiny into their hand in Nigeria. The Nigeria and Nigerians that I know, that I can speak of and that I belong to is not known for violence. There won't be possibly any piracy in Somalia too. Definitely, the teeming youths will be preoccupied with something more tangible than guns and 'living for only today' if only they are given alternative. Having said this, indulging in criminal activities no matter how deplorable the situation might be is not the best choice either.

African states should structure the society in such a way that accommodates and encourages equal participation in government at all levels, in all regions and states of the continent regardless of one's ethnic background or religious affiliation. This will bring about unity and emphasis on ethnicity will fizzle away in no distant time. Retaliating force with force, proportionate or not, as we have now in Nigeria cannot be the solution to Nigeria problem both in the short or long term. Violence begets bigger violence; the victims remain the majority of Africans who continuously live in the illusion of peace and security whereas we are on a time bomb.

What is happening in Nigeria is not totally different from what is happening in many other African states. Many states in Africa are preoccupied with one form of conflict or the other as a result of excessive power politics of our political actors at the detriment of the body politics. The power politics in Côte d'Ivoire that ended with the forced exit and avoidable humiliation of Laurent Gbagbo in April 2011 nearly brought the country to a point of another civil war but for the intervention of the international community. Guinea Bissau, Niger, Chad, among others are all involved in power politics even when there are pressing developmental, peace and security

challenges facing the government of these states. The North African leaders of course are learning the hard way as we are witnessing. The result of all these power intoxication by African leaders is purely a step forward and ten steps backward dragging the continent further into a pit of conflict, poverty and insecurity. The led, the angry millions that has taking laws into their hand and continue to threaten peaceful coexistence also share in the blame. But once we get it right at the top, it will trickle down to the led and perhaps we can then sleep with two eyes closed; peace and security guaranteed.

Where does European African alliance come into this picture of precarious balance in Africa? There are many things we can learn from our European brothers or states. One of such is how they have been able to sustain their democratic states for decades; how to think in the context of 'national projects'; not in personal, uncoordinated and overtly self-interest manner and lastly how to put the people first in governance, in policy formulation and its implementation. I am sure our leaders for example in Nigeria know this but chose to focus on power politics that ought to be made secondary on the match for sustainable peace and security. Of course, we know peace and security don't exist in a vacuum. We must lay foundation for both. The time to act is long overdue.

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