

## **RETHINKING SECURITY FOR A NEW NIGERIA<sup>1</sup>**

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**Protocol:**

I was pleased when I received the invitation to speak at this conference of the South East Zone of the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA). The theme of the conference, “State, Security and Economy in Nigeria” is very appropriate and timely, especially at a time when the South East is in the news a lot on a matter bordering on security.

As you know, I am from the North East of the country which has been devastated by the Boko Haram insurgency in the last few years in what is obviously Nigeria’s longest domestic war. Here in the South East, the Nigerian Army is engaged in what it calls Operation Python Dance II, partly in response to threats to public peace. Both cases, for different reasons and in different ways, have involved threats to the Nigerian state, to the corporate existence of Nigeria.

But these are not the only manifestations of insecurity in the country. Here in the South East also, kidnapping and armed robbery remain at high levels. In the nearby Niger Delta, kidnapping, armed robbery, oil theft and vandalism against oil installations remain major concerns. The same goes for portions of the South West. Across the North, especially North-Central, and increasingly all over the country, clashes between farmers and Fulani herders continue to cost enormous amounts of lives and properties. And let’s not forget the numerous intra- and inter-communal clashes often over land and other resources among farming communities across the country.

It is safe to say that Nigerians have never felt this insecure, in the post-civil war period. That feeling is made worse by the nature of news coverage in this era of 24-hour news cycle, and social media feeds which, together, easily create the impression that we are under siege. Although the vast majority of our people go about their normal businesses, many do so in fear and apprehension. Thus, it is important to address these manifestations of insecurity. The primary responsibility of any government is the security of its people. Without public security there would be little justification for government. This indeed is a sacred ingredient of the Social Contract between citizens and the State.

Thankfully the Federal government has made significant progress in fighting the Boko Haram insurgency, although major challenges still remain, including sporadic attacks on soft targets by the group and the need to return the displaced persons to their homes and businesses and restore normalcy in the area.

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There is little doubt that these security challenges have had a negative impact on our economy as investors typically shy away from areas of insecurity and instability. The example of the North East is there for everybody to see. When you add our infrastructural deficits and policy inconsistencies, as well as our dependence on and fights over unstable oil revenues, attracting investments becomes even more difficult.

So how can we rethink security in the context of wide-ranging manifestations of insecurity in the country?

As you know, no one person would have all the answers to these security and other challenges. As political scientists you are perhaps better placed to proffer solutions to our security challenges, especially those of you with an interdisciplinary bent who rightly go beyond the narrow confines of politics to incorporate historical, social, economic and psychological factors in your analysis.

As a group of teachers and researchers gathered here, your deliberations would add to our understanding of these difficult challenges and how we can meet them so as to improve our country and ensure greater security, peace, unity and stability.

I hope to raise some questions along those lines and make some suggestions on how we can begin to answer those questions.

### **Security is Not Just Law and Order**

We have the tendency to look at security narrowly as a simple law and order thing: if there is insecurity, deploy security forces and quell it; arrest rule breakers try and possibly punish them. Looked at that way, the various manifestations of insecurity that I have highlighted would call for expanding the size of our coercive instruments - simply more police, civil defence, army, and the like. However important those may be, security is more complicated than that. It will be more useful to try to identify the factors that conduce to a particular form of insecurity and to see if they are connected to those of others, thus allowing for a more holistic analysis and policy responses.

You can deal with the leadership of groups that threaten national security and the sovereignty of the state according to the law, but you also need to address the grievances around which they are able to rally their followers, as well as create a society where young people are educated and gainfully employed. These would make it difficult for them to become easy fodder for demagogues of any hue.

For instance, is the Niger Delta militancy, including pipeline vandalism mere criminality or linked to the politics of resource control and environmental activism? Are the herdsmen-farmers clashes simply a result of ethnic hatred, attempts at domination or the struggle over land and its resources as such resources shrink due to population growth, increasing desertification and climate change as well as our inability to change to more modern methods of animal breeding? How do we account for the epidemic of kidnapping and cultism in these parts of the country? And to what extent are these violent crimes and militancy linked to the proliferation of small arms resulting from the prolonged armed conflicts in the West African and Sahel sub-

regions, as well as our porous borders? Are these criminal enterprises connected in any way to the youth bulge and rise in unemployment and underemployment? And how is the IPOB and similar separatist and militant groups able to recruit thousands of young people to their misguided belief that another civil war is in the best interest of the Igbo or any group? What does it say about our educational system and the attention we pay our youth that the recruits to these militant and separatist organizations fail to see that the contexts of our political make-up and disagreements in 1966 are vastly different from those of the contemporary period, thus making them fall prey to the modern-day demagogues and the fantasies they promote?

As social scientists, what steps would you consider critical to optimizing Nigeria's development and positioning for the economy of the future?

Let me suggest that in order to ensure a lasting improvement in our security we must do the following as a matter of urgency, and not necessarily in this order:

- Enlarge and properly equip, train and remunerate the police force. This is rather obvious. Internal security is primarily the responsibility of the police and domestic intelligence agencies. Our current police force of about 300,000 is inadequate to police 170 million people, especially with inadequate equipment, training and remuneration. But beyond that:
- We have to improve our economy urgently. So, steps to inject life into the economy are critical: We must drop all excuses and improve power supply in the country. Without power we cannot really industrialize, and without industrialization we really cannot have a modern, self-sustaining economy. In addition to power, such other critical infrastructure as roads and railways need urgent repairs and expansion. Work to effect these would create immediate employment for thousands of our young people in addition to their contributions to facilitating trade and the movement of people. If we have to borrow money to build roads, bridges, air and sea ports and railways, it is justified because of the boost that they will give to our economy and job creation. If we do not improve our economy urgently, I worry that the internal operations periodically carried out by the army – whether it's *Python Dance*, *Crocodile Tears* or *Lafia Dole* - will become a permanent and dangerous feature of our realities while retaining their temporary effect as solutions.
- As we work to improve our economy we must listen to the agitations of those complaining about marginalization or exclusion or the unwieldy nature of the Federal Government. From their various angles, they clamour for a new structure of relationships of the various components of this country. We must learn to provide answers to their questions, proffer explanations for their concerns, and provide solutions to the reasonable issues they raise. Dismissing them or shutting them down is no substitute for a reasoned study of the issues and the difficult work of effecting changes to make our country work better. Every segment of the population and section of the country

should have a sense of belonging. Thus, we must address expressed grievances of exclusion and marginalization in order to forge greater unity as a country.

- We must, therefore, restructure our polity by devolving powers to states urgently, including allowing State Police for States that so desire. I've said repeatedly that we do not need Federal Roads, Federal Schools and Federal Hospitals. These should be handed over to the States where they are located along with the funds hitherto expended on them by the Federal Government. We must decongest the Exclusive Legislative List and transfer much of what's there to the Concurrent List. The Exclusive List should contain only those matters that the centre is best positioned to handle such as Defence, Immigration, Customs and Excise, Foreign Policy, Currency and Monetary Policy, and Standards and Measures. Devolution of powers and resources to the States should allow for local control of resources derived therein while the Federal Government retains taxation powers. State Police will no doubt improve security at the local levels and the nation as a whole. I have heard critics who say our Governors will abuse State Police. I reply that the fear that someone might abuse State Police is not the reason not to do what we know we need badly. We cannot shy away from doing what will obviously improve security in the country just because some Governors might seek to abuse their powers. Societies improve and become more civilized and democratic not by avoiding doing the right thing but by constantly challenging wrong-doing, especially by officials and those in powerful positions.
- We must improve and expand our educational system. Modern economies require educated and highly trained workforce. We must not only absorb the millions of school-age children who are out of school but also diversify our educational offerings to provide relevant vocational training for our youth to enable them to quickly become gainfully employed. This will help improve productivity in our country. It will also help to improve security by denying extremist groups and dangerous demagogues a reserve army of idle labour from which to recruit.
- There is a critical need for us to continue to improve transparency in governance, including how we communicate with the people. This will help inform and educate them as to the choices made by government including political appointments and provision or denial of services. In a democracy, citizens are entitled to know what their government is doing and the rationale for same. And they are entitled to answers to their questions and concerns. But when governments behave like an army of occupation, viewing citizens' questions and concerns as irritants, transparency and accountability are not served. That is wrong and helps to stir ill-feelings and threats to peace.

My dear friends, in my view, these are some of the things that would be involved in rethinking security for a new and improved Nigeria.

Let me conclude by making one thing clear: at no time did the elite in Liberia, Somalia, Rwanda or South Sudan come together and agreed to destroy their countries. The tragedies that befell those countries in their recent history came about from incremental statements and actions and inactions by individuals, groups and institutions that added up to the mindless violence and destruction that followed. We must take every threat to our corporate existence seriously and address them with the firmness and resolve that it deserves. We must isolate extremist groups and stamp out violent ones while we seriously and methodically address the issues that tend to bring them about. We have a right to agitate for equitable treatment and representation in government and government services. And government has a responsibility to address those concerns. But as elite, we also have to be mindful of using extremist groups to threaten the corporate existence of the country in the hope of winning some concessions. Once unleashed, we may not be able to control such groups. It may be impossible to put the genie back in the bottle, as it were.

I express my profound appreciation to the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA), South East Zone for inviting me to deliver this keynote address. I wish you all fruitful deliberations. Thank you for your attention.