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CONTEMPORARY ARC OF INSTABILITY IN WEST AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this article is the contemporary interconnection of instability in Nigeria. The contiguous nature and interconnected factors of social, political, ethnic, and marginalization campaign, in a new dimension, has bedevil Nigeria in the proportions never experienced before in the checkered history of this potentially great nation. The author thoroughly researches the activities of Boko Haram, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)/Independent People of Biafra (IPOB), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and the Fulani herdsmen. The research reveals the indicators of Nigeria becoming a "breeding grounds of instability, mass migration, and murder", as well as reservoirs and exporter of terror in West Africa sub-region.

The study concludes that, the existence of such a country, and the instability that it harbor, not only threatens the lives and livelihoods of its own people but endangers world peace. Ultimately incapable of projecting power and asserting authority within her own borders, leaving her territory governmentally empty. The author among others recommended the need for a National Conference to address the agitations of these groups (actors) or implement the report of already concluded National Conference and the need for the Federal Government to re-position her priorities in respect to the activities and responsibilities of the intelligence agencies in addressing this menace.



Keywords: Boko Haram, Nigeria, Biafra, Fulani Herdsmen, Niger Delta, Insurgency, IPOB, MASSOB, Terrorism, Instability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, the sub-regional power and the main peace keeper (Nigeria) is experiencing the rise of instability on its own soil.

The “Arc of Instability” is an interconnection and chain of unstable events in a region or countries that are contiguous and have major political, military and economic repercussions in the entire Country/Region [38, 21]. The term is used to suggest that the members of the Arc are interconnected to the point that destabilisation within one country or region can have major political, military and economic repercussions in the entire country.

The outcome of the activities of members of the “Arc”(Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, Niger Delta Avengers, and MASSOB/IPOB) contiguously resulted to the spate of instability and destabilization and destruction of lives and properties in Nigeria.

Every concerned Nigerian or observer may have a question of, will Nigeria be able to surmount its current problems as a result of these dreadful precipice and instability? the answer lay's awake in this paper.

However, it is exigent to note that the contiguous nature and interconnected factors of social, political, ethnic, and marginalization campaign, in a new dimension has now bedevil Nigeria in the proportions never experienced before in the checkered history of this potentially great nation.

The dangerous escalation of terrorists and marginalization campaigns with all the hallmarks of woes, as it appears to dominate the essential character of this arch of instability now portray Nigeria clearly to be a nation at war with itself.

The ugly state of instability in Nigeria reached a crescendo when armed Boko Haram terrorists continue to perpetuate heinous act. And the emergence of armed Fulani herdsmen on the scene and their ability to turn many hitherto peaceful farming communities across Nigeria into killing fields [17]. On the one hand, the reawaken of instability caused by MASSOB/IPOB been attributed to the nature and character of the Nigerian state and her polity, with the perceptions of marginalization in the distribution of power and resources, and the repressive tactics of the state to its sub-national dissent, have encouraged the growth [42].

Furthermore, the current instability in the country's South South region by the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) group and the attacks on oil installations in a campaign which threatens the economy of Africa's most populous state, have had an immediate and significant impact on Nigeria's wealth, as they have pushed the country's oil output to its lowest level in decades (slashed Nigeria's oil production from 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.4 million bpd) [15, 41, 60, 59]. The result and outcome of events of this arc has given birth to Nigeria's contemporary state of instability.

Therefore it's imperative to examine the implication of this groups in the regions/Nigeria as regard security and stability in West Africa and Nigeria in particular.



2. THE NEW ARC OF INSTABILITY

The Fund for Peace, a Washington D.C.-based non-profit, non-governmental research and educational institution, whose index is of an annual ranking based on country's levels of stability and the pressures they face, has ranked Nigeria as one of the world's most unstable countries. In its 12th annual Fragile States Index (FSI), it ranked Nigeria alongside war-torn Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Guinea, Pakistan, Burundi and Zimbabwe [56, 23].

Nigeria was also placed among countries classified as "high alert" meaning that the situation in Nigeria had worsened compared to the previous years. This category is just one level shy of the "very high alert" which comprises countries like Syria, Somalia, Central Africa Republic, Congo Democratic Republic, Yemen, Chad, Sudan and South Sudan where peace had totally collapsed. It stated that like the crisis in Syria, pressures had bled across Nigeria's borders to its neighbours [23].

In 2014, terrorist attacks took place in 28 states and the Federal Capital Territory; however, they were heavily concentrated in Borno, where 40% of the attacks took place. Nigeria accordingly experienced a staggering 300 percent rise in terrorism deaths in 2014, although other militant groups take partial blame for the increase. In particular the Fulani militants killed 1,229 in Nigeria [6].

According to the warning of the former US Congressman Frank Wolf, he said "the humanitarian crisis in war-torn Syria will be a child's play compared to the crisis that is gradually brewing in Nigeria with a population of over 180 million" [52].

Hence, the need to examine the events within the arc of Nigeria's contemporary instability.

3. FULANI HERDSMEN IN NIGERIA

Fulani herdsmen, nomadic cattle grazers, have been named one of the deadliest terror groups in the world comparable to Boko Haram, ISIS, the Taliban and al-Shabaab. The group has wreaked enough havoc to be acknowledged by the global community as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world [50, 27. C. 22].

The tension between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities has existed for many years. However in recent times Nigeria has been witnessing a dramatic escalation to include many more attacks, kidnappings, armed robbery, killings etc. The brutality and impunity with which the assailants operate without regard for the law and the sanctity of life is appalling [25, 58].

There has been increase in the destardedly act between 2014 to 2016. Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa, Plateau, Kaduna and Katsina states have been the worst hit and of late Oyo, Ekiti, Ondo, Osun, Ogun, Kogi, Enugu, Abia, Anambra, Delta, Edo and parts of Rivers States [58] having suffered devastating attacks by the Fulani herdsmen with a heavy toll in human lives and property.

The Fulani herdsmen are armed with sophisticated weapons and usually attack and killing of their target indiscriminately, burning houses and looting properties. The Global Terrorism Index of 2015 states that over 90 per cent of the attacks carried out by the group are on private citizens. Invading farming communities including women and children in various states across the country.



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In a report published by SMB Intelligence, over 2,000 people have been killed in conflicts between the herdsmen in 2015 alone. In comparison, the Boko Haram insurgency that has attracted the attention of the Nigerian government and the global community kills 2,500 people annually, the report states [49, 36].

The ethnic nationalities incessantly attacked by the Fulani militia have warned that if the government fails to protect them, they are left with no other choice than to form their own militias to defend themselves and their land from the marauders [54, 3, 25].

Nigeria will be heading to a degenerated state of anarchy and into a situation of a failed state if the aforementioned is to happen.

4. NIGER DELTA AVENGERS (NDA)

The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) is the latest militant group to emerge in Nigeria - attacking oil installations in a campaign which threatens the economy of Africa's most populous state. The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) are a militant group in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The group publicly announced their existence in March 2016 [8, 15, 53, 44].

These attacks has caused Nigeria to fall behind Angola as Africa's largest oil producer."The renewed activities of the militants in the Niger Delta is seriously affecting our oil production," Minister of Finance Kemi Adeosun admitted on state-owned NTA television. In their website they have declared: "We are a group of educated and well-travelled individuals that are poised to take the Niger Delta struggle to new heights that has never been seen in this nation before,""We have well-equipped human resources to meet this goal [22, 9]."

For President Buhari, the NDA presents another fresh form of instability and security challenge to the government which has been grappling with Islamist insurgency in the north-east of the country [9].

The group in addition of series of attacks, they have made series of demands including the release of the Biafran independence activist Nnamdi Kanu from detention. The group (NDA) has been described as the "nation's tormentor-in-chief" according to the website www.gongnews.net [44, 13].

5. BOKO HARAM AND ANSARU

Boko Haram, self acclaimed as Wilāyat Gharb Ifrīqīyyah (Islamic State West Africa Province, ISWAP), and Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād meaning "Group of the People of Sunnah for Preaching and Jihad"), is an Islamic extremist/terrorist group based in northeastern Nigeria and also active in Niger, Chad and northern Cameroon. It had alleged links to al-Qaeda, and also announced its allegiance to Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in March 2015 [2, 29, 14, 30, 45].

The Boko Haram upheaval in the north has without adoubt, the character of an insurgency and Terrorism. The rise of the Boko Haram(meaning 'Western education is sinful') [40] has brought about heightenedtension, anxiety and a sense of insecurity and gross instability hitherto unknown in anypart of Nigeria. They have attacked both the police and military, churches andother places of worship, schools, international agencies, marketsquares and other highly-public targets.



After its founding in 2002, the group's increasing radicalization led to a violent uprising in July 2009 in which its leader was arrested and killed. Its unexpected resurgence came after a mass prison break in September 2010, later accompanied by increasingly sophisticated attacks, progressed in 2011 to include suicide bombings of police buildings and the United Nations office in Abuja [32, 43, 10].

The Global Terrorism Index 2015 placed Nigeria as 3rd in the list of terror ranking countries in the world to be 9.21 just below Iraq and Afghanistan. And also stated that; "The effects of terrorism are felt most strongly in the Middle East and Africa, and countries such as Iraq and Nigeria account for the majority of deaths due to terrorist attacks [19]."

According to the report and statistics by START, Terrorism in Nigeria in 2014 was marked by severe increases in the total number of attacks (114%), fatalities (308%), injuries (376%), and hostages (1,358%) compared to 2013. Nine of the 20 deadliest individual terrorist attacks in 2014 took place in Nigeria attributed to the Nigerian group Boko Haram. In 2014, the average number of deaths caused by attacks in Nigeria was 12.8. Nearly 1,300 people were kidnapped or taken hostage in terrorist attacks in Nigeria in 2014, in April, 276 students from a government-run secondary school in Chibok. In December, 185 people from Gumsuri village. Both attacks were attributed to Boko Haram [6, 26].

Nigeria-based Boko Haram and Islamic State were the two terrorist groups responsible for over a half of the killings in 2014 – according to the Global Terrorism Index published by the Institute for Economic and Peace (IEP). The Nigerian jihadists, killed more people than their fellow Islamists, claiming 6,644 lives compared to 6,073. Since the insurgency started in 2009, it has killed more than 20,000 and displaced more than 2.3 million, at least 250,000 have left Nigeria and fled into Cameroon, Chad or Niger. It was also ranked in 2015 as the world's deadliest terror group by the Global Terrorism Index [46, 51, 11, 39, 48, 27 C. 41].

The group's weaponry includes bombs, arms and ammunitions of various degrees of lethal capacity. The government is probably doing its best to contain the insurgency, but it is imperative that the task of bringing back the peace and tranquillity that once characterised the northern region of Nigeria must be of great concern [28, 4].

6. ANSARU (JAMA'ATU ANSARIL MUSLIMINA FI BILADIS SUDAN)

In Arabic; Jama'atu Ansaril Muslimina Biladis Sudan, better known as Ansaru (which means Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Lands), is an Islamist jihadist militant organisation based in the northeast of Nigeria. It is a splinter Islamist jihadist militant organisation group of the larger Boko Haram organisation, founded in January 2012 based in the northeast of Nigeria. The terrorist group's motto is "Jihad Fi Sabilillah", meaning "struggle for the cause of Allah". It is reportedly to have more of an international focus than Boko Haram. The group has connection with the northern Mali-based al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa. Ansaru has been designated as a terrorist organization by New Zealand and the UK Home Office [7, 12, 31, 34, 35].

According to Thomas Joscelyn (2015), the group leader Abu Usmatul al-Ansari (nom de guerre of Khalid al-Barnawi) in



January 2012 via the internet released their first statement described Boko Haram actions as "inhuman to the Muslim Ummah" (Muslim community). And, also claim in June 2012 in a video through the Internet that the terrorist group will not kill innocent non-Muslims or security officials, except they have to do it in "self defense", that their aim is to defend and protect the interests of Islam and Muslims in Nigeria and the whole of Africa continent. In 2013 it was reported that most of its leaders returned back to Boko Haram. And Ansaru leader described as Al-Qaeda's "backbone" in West Africa, has reportedly been arrested by Nigerian security forces in April 2016 [55, 16, 1, 12, 18, 33].

7. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA (IPOB)

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is an association of indigenous Ibo ethnic groups in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The association is allegedly to have been duly registered in over 30 countries of the world. It is led by an England base political activist - Nnamdi Kanu. Who has been detained by the Federal Government of Nigeria since October 2015 despite court orders for his release [57, 20].

However, it's a reborn agitation that was started by Ojukwu Odumegun during the Nigerian civil war/the declaration of Biafra Republic between 1967 -1970, reawaken by Uwnzurike for the restoration of the sovereignty of the Republic of Biafra in form of Movement for the actualisation of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) and now Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) by Nnamdi Kanu.

There has been series of attacks and clashes between the Federal government forces and IPOB members. According to Amnesty International the Nigerian Army shot and killed 17 members and injured at least 50 others during the protest of IPOB members in Onitsha, Anambra state in May 2016. And the police also reported that some IPOB supporters killed two policemen in Asaba, Delta state. In the same vain an eyewitness told Amnesty International that he saw the military officers open fire on some young men at Nkpor Motor Park [47] in Anambra state Nigeria.

In a joint military and police operations in 2015 the Amnesty reported that IPOB members we also killed between August, October, November and December 2015 during a celebration of a court order for the release of their purported leader, Nnamdi Kanu. Also in February 2016 by the used of excessive force used by the Nigerian forces 10 people were killed in a school compound in Aba and many more were injured [47].

IPOB stating that the nation Nigeria will not have peace until it's leader Nnamdi Kanu, is been release unconditionally. In addition, in a media statement released and signed by Emma Powerful IPOB media and publicity secretary stated that, "the situation in the country now calls for unity renegotiation," [24].

8. CONCLUSION

From the aforementioned and the historical fact of the Nigerian history, the indicators are glaring, profuse and ominous. We can identify the interconnections of instability in the structure of Nigeria state, as a result of it's continuous prominence in Nigerian



politics and ethno-religious and economic struggles for supremacy.

However, “It is very clear that the spate of instability in Nigeria as a result of the interconnection of the activities of events in the “Arc”. From the declaration of Niger delta Republic to Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) and to Niger Delta Avengers in the South South. While in the South East from the Declaration of the State of Biafra ie. The civil war to MASSOB and now to Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). In the Northern part of Nigeria it has been from Maitaisine to Boko Haram and Ansaru and also the Fulani Herdsmen [37] ravaging the six geo-political zones today. These has led to a measure of destabilization of peace and security of lives and properties in Nigeria. This is much clear by the pictorial and other evidence that the people of the affected areas in Nigeria are going through terrible things daily in the hands of these groups. “Lives and properties are no longer safe from these people who killed and maim at will.”

There primary cause of the continuous rise of instability in Nigeria has been the increase level of distrust, mutual suspicion [5], antagonism and lack of equitable distribution of economic resources over the years. These has made way into the political, religious and economic class.

The federal government must as a matter of priority re-position the intelligence agencies, the police and the Nigerian Immigration Service to be alive to their sworn duty and responsibilities in dealing with this menace and identifying and expelling foreign nationals who constitute security risks to the country.

In addition, “the national Confab must deliberate on the Niger Delta agitations (Avengers and others), the Fulani herdsmen and their host farmers’ palaver with a view to recommending a just solution to this potential anarchy and destruction of the unity of Nigeria [25].

Finally, it’s imperative to note that the interconnectivity of these causative factors and activities of members of the arc are still very visible and has ultimately led to the present state of Nigeria’s consequential struggle for peace and stability.

Nigeria is at the moment of a crossroads. At the end of the day, given the dynamics of the “Arc of Instability” and the turbulence in the polity, decisions and actions taken will certainly dictate whether Nigeria can survive as a state or splinter into fledgling micro-mini states.

The problem is, if the slide is not checked in good time, the fallout and trauma in the Nigerian case is likely to be worse than Yugoslavia and Somalia put together. It is therefore instructive to understand and appreciate each of the phenomena of the chain and interconnection of event that composed the “Arc”. In the process, it will be necessary to answer the question whether, given a failure to abate or mitigate the dynamic interplay of the lethal factors prevailing in the state of instability, Nigeria can survive or will break up as similarly situated countries have historically done.

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