

Religious Crisis and National Security in Nigeria

Iyanda Kamoru Ahmed*

Abstract

This paper discusses Religious Crisis and National Security in Nigeria. The Nigerian Nation has undergone series of devastating religious crises some of which have had ethnic coloration. It has subsequently led to the destruction of lives and property which has also constituted a major threat to the nation's unity, invariably affecting its national security imperatives, procedures and structure; thus highlighting the non-existence of a concise national security strategy and policy in Nigeria. This chapter intends to discuss the factors that have warranted such and to proffer solutions.

Keywords: Religious crisis, national security, civil war, ethnicity and national development

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country characterized by an intense ethno religious polarization and conflict, since independence. In Nigeria, the population is divided between the three main religious groups, Muslims, traditionalists and Christians.

On the part of national security, it is a concept that encompasses psychological and physical components. The actions and goals of government and its strategy to achieve and ensure psychological and physical demands of national security comprise national security policy and strategy. This serves as a blue print for survival in an externally and internally hostile socio-political and economic environment [1–5]. It is imperative for a country to formulate and ensure a reliable security policy and strategy, as such certain basic procedures and activities must be carried out. First, the nation must clearly identify its national interests or objectives. Secondly, threats, against these vital interests must be identified. The various measures taken to neutralize such threats are a nation's national security policy and strategy. This will comprise a broad course of action or statements of guidance to facilitate the achievement of national security within the country (Balami 1999:148). Nigeria is a country of great cultural, linguistic and religious heterogeneity. It has not been easy to bring together these diverse groups into a united nation [6–10]. A civil war had to be fought and every now and then, there are dissatisfactions from regional groupings, communal clashes or religious unrest. These are centrifugal forces which constitute serious threats to national survival and which necessitates a tentative national security posture [11–15].

*Author for Correspondence

Iyanda Kamoru Ahmed
E-mail: ogiyanhistonet@gmail.com

Senior Lecturer (Ph.d.), Department of History and International Studies, Federal University Gashua Yobe State, Nigeria

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The political state has only emphasized the military perspective to national security, whereas there are non-military perspectives to national security [16–19]. Also issues pertaining to external threats which could cause externally fomented aggression towards a nation are taken far more seriously than internally oriented threat issues which could further undermine a nation's security [20–25]. As such the weakness in addressing issues

of internal security becomes more significant since external threats though real in spheres of economy and society are not most likely to occur at the frequency of internal security threats [26–31].

Nigeria is confronted by a security dilemma because of its dictatorial and military antecedents in governance vis-à-vis prevailing efforts at entrenching democratic values represent two powerful but opposing currents. Nigeria's antecedents therefore create a bleak institutional and psychological.

A democratic, strategic, and sustainable security strategy cannot be established in the current environment. This situation is compounded by internal security threats posed by endemic communal and sectarian conflicts, religious crises, wide spread armed robbery and banditry, political terrorism with a variant to political assassination attempts, violence, etc. (Fwa 2005:40).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to facilitate exposition of the main themes and propositions of Western theory of political development, Ake (1979:1) began with its summary.

1. Political systems may be conceived in dynamic terms as active agents, which have capabilities, perform functions, influence their environment and are in turn influenced by it.
2. Political systems undergo or an undergo development. They may be usefully compared on a continuum of development.
3. Structural differentiation, cultural secularization, equality and capacity.
4. The order in which the political system meets and resolves these crises constitutes its sequence for development. The particular sequence of a given political system affects its capabilities and performance.
5. To the extent that a political system is developed, it. Acquires the capacity to perform a wide range of functions such as the maintenance of order, the extraction of resources, etc.

As far as Riggs was concerned (Varma 1980:339) the developing of equality was symbolized by leftist groups and of capacity by rightist groups. In this case one can assume that religious inclinations which leads to religious crisis as rightist and the factor needed to ensure political developmental structures at which security is a part as the leftist groups and unless a balance is struck between the two; political development was likely to get into what Riggs described as a “developmental trap”. This is very much evidenced in times of religious upheavals in the country in which the slight, though visible indices of development which are glaring gets razed to the ground or becomes destroyed due to irreconcilable differences of the rightist and leftist factions [32–36]. These rightist and leftist factions could even take place as different sects within the same religion by preaching a different doctrine in order to get the upper hand and amass pilgrims. Such as the Maitasine crisis in the 1980s and the Boko-Haram conflict in 2009 or it could be ethno-religious conflicts, which originates sometimes as the settler-indigene conflict and disguises under religion or plainly, it could be between the Muslims and Christians each agitating as the one worshipping the one true God [37, 38].

At first impression, security mainly means and connotes the protective aspect of security. Whereas security as a concept is all encompassing because it is multifaceted and multi-dimensional. Security as a basic subject has a global impact on any society. It is quite evidenced from the myriad of write-ups on security, that from the 1960s when Nigeria gained independence, little has been done to actually put down, ensure and monitor security strategies and policies to ensure the wellbeing of the nation and its citizens. Security, according to proponents of alternative security strategy is multifaceted going beyond physical protection to encompass political, economic, environmental, cultural and social security (Buzan 1991, cited in Fwa 2005:31). Abubakar (2000) also sees security in terms of citizens and human rights security He also sees it as SMSS security, industrial security, productive security, security engineering, political security, etc.

According to Fwa (2005) there is a new thinking which has benefited from the increasing awareness of the non-military nature of the vulnerabilities of the Third World countries. This new thinking, which has flourished especially among African and Third World scholars, conceives of security in still broader terms to include the whole gamut of human needs.

Based on this new thinking, one could construct a model which our security agenda can pursue with the hope of realizing a comprehensive and sustainable national security in the longer term. Social inclusion and economic opportunities, protection of rights and a functioning democracy are the foundations of a secure state and society and to ensure that security is not reduced to the mere exercise of coercive power (Fwa 2005:32).

National Security Dilemma in Nigeria

In this sense, when we talk about national security, we should be understood as saying that apart from the physical survival of Nigeria's territorial states, security must have a positive impact on the conditions of life of the inhabitants with the right atmosphere for their self-improvement and actualizations. Specifically from 1999 Nigeria's security is hinged on an intractable internal conflict, a civilian population threatened by illegal and armed militia and the collaboration of the paramilitary who commit human rights abuses (Imobighe 1998).

It is also replete with tales of ethnic conflicts, religious crisis and communal identity issues which remain a potent instrument of material advancement in Nigeria (Vanguard June 14, 2006). As the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s and the attendant ill conceived and executed programmes took their toll on the states finances, institutions and moral standing, the economic groups with emboldened.

They have, therefore found it expedient to make their own security arrangements as they have also done in other sectors of national life. Thus private security outfits, private militia, ethnic militia, vigilante groups, political thugs, cult groups and similar outfits have proliferated, providing security for hire (Vanguard June 14, 2006). Today, the culture of violence has already eaten deep into our social fabric. Inter-ethnic armed conflicts, area boy's syndrome, violent upheavals by different interest groups, inter-religious violent conflicts, armed robbery in our homes, on the streets, on the highway, etc., are familiar occurrences and becoming part of our daily lives. The incidence of violence and social turbulence in the Nigerian situation threatening peace, social harmony, and developmental process as it were, are caused by a number of factors running from cultural plurality, competing sectional interests, demands, unprecedented poverty levels to crass inequalities. These forces cause, foster and foist on the system a culture of violence. The more a society is able to control these negative tendencies, the higher it attains a level of peace, which is a necessary ingredient for national attainment of objectives and self-actualization (Fwa 2005:43).

The Basis of Religious Crisis in Nigeria

Due to the intricacies of religious politics in the First Republic which we shall not delve into; the confrontation between Muslims created dents on the image of the "United North" which was promoted by the then Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sarkin Sokoto. Who felt that the most reliable and lasting bond of friendship and unity could only be fostered by a common faith in the brotherhood of man and shared by adherents of the same religion. He then took it upon himself as a personal duty to spread Islam to all areas in Nigeria, where non-Muslims predominated (Ashiwaju, et al. 1995:301).

By the Second Republic, religion had made an alarming inroad into the political affairs of Nigeria. This occurred in spite of the fact that at the Constitutional level Nigeria is a substation that the state should concern itself with political, economic and social matters and leave spiritual matters for

individuals to decide for themselves. But this constitutional provision is hardly operational in Nigeria today. Religion is no longer regarded as something spiritual and personal; indeed it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate religion from Nigeria's economic, social and political existence (Ashiwaju, et al, 1995:304). It has become an inescapable aspect of our search for national integration and stability.

What after all is religion? Like other primordial identities, it is difficult to define, depending on the field of studies; it is seen in different ways.

Therefore religion in this context is what gives meaning to human life and actions. Religion is also an issue of identity which is about solidarity and setting of boundaries between those who are considered to be believers and those that are not. This deals with issues of sentiments, feelings and norms that may be as a result of shared experiences. This identity is collectively protected, when it is considered to be challenged by other forces (Egwu 1998:17).

With the foregoing definitions of religion discussed, we'll go on to analyse the onset of religious crisis-in the country. From documented sources from Lamido (2006) Ubah (1988) Ashiwaju et al (1996) etc., religious tensions did not just start occurring recently but right from colonial times. During the colonial period, missionaries in the Northern protectorate were disallowed to propagate Christianity which would otherwise be against the already entrenched Islamic values and the Islamic religion. This continued down to independence with the resulted coup which engulfed the country by a faction of Igbo military officers who were Christians. This eventually led to the civil war and due to the Biafran propaganda the views were reinforced that the war was motivated by religious differences. Therefore steps were promptly taken to give the true background to the conflict. Other issues which created tensions included the question of the precise proportion of Nigeria's population who view the question of the indigenes/foreigners of Islam and Christianity. The extent of the neutrality, impartiality of the Nigerian State in its relationship and dealings with the two major religious groups. The overheated controversy over Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and the Shariah debacle as far back as 1978 in the constituent Assembly (Ashiwaju et al 1995:3 19). The epitome of religious fanaticism was it series of riots engineered by the Maitatsine sporadic incidents in Kano 1980 followed subsequently by others in Bullunkutu, Borno in 1982, Rigasa, Kaduna in 1982, Jimeta, Yola in 1984 and Gombe in 1985 (Ashiwaju et al 1995:318). Also in 1980 in Kasuwan-Magani, 1984 in Zangon Kataf and Gure Kahugu, Kafanchan in 1987 and Lere in 1992 and again the Zangon-Kataf crisis which had more religious than ethnic concerns (Abdu 2002).

Religious Crises and National Security in Post 1999 to date and the transitions from military to civil democracy. The reason for this should be placed in context. Democracy is usually characterized by openness and transparency. It is also about self-expression and tolerance. All these mark a significant departure from military rule. Arising from this era of democratic freedom is self-expression of many religious and ethnic identities. Hence from 1999-2003 alone; the country has witnessed about 47 ethnic, religious or ethno religious crises combined. These included those of the Warr mayhem in Delta 2003, crisis in Jos 2004, conflicts in Sagamu 1999, Kano reprisal killings of 1999, the Odi killings of 1999, the Olehiolomoro communal crisis of 1999, the Kaduna mayhem of 2000, the Aba reprisal attacks, the Ife/Modakeke crisis of 2000, the Zaki Biam crisis of 2004 and a host of others unmentioned (Kwankwaso 2005:14).

Also with the singular action of Alhaj i Sani Yariman Bakura (the then Zamfara State Governor) on the 27th October 1999, who launched the new Islamic legal and administrative system, this generated a great deal of controversy especially among the Christian groups both in and out of Zamfara; despite the fact that the Zamfara State government tried to allay the fears of non- Muslims that the shariah legal system-will not infringe on their-rights to religion and possible subjection to Islamic law. The government argued that it was for Muslims only (Abdu 2002:169-170).

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Archbishop of Lagos; warned that the imposition of Shariah would breed religious intolerance and spark off violent reactions which may threaten the nation's stability. According to Egwu (1998:24) the attendant conflicts faced with the phenomenon of religious politics is that which has been generated especially in relation to the two official religions, Christianity and Islam. Islam, according to Abdul (2002:148) is regarded as much more than faith in the heart of Muslims, it is also a source of identity. It is this symbiosis of faith and community that over the time gave rise to Muslim historical consciousness. Islamic religion is seen by most traditionalists and revivalists groups as 'dinun wa dawalatun' religion and a state. In this context, politics and religion are inseparable and that shariah must be applied to all Muslims whether voluntary or by force. This is the theological basis for the recurring nature of the shariah debate in Nigeria. Therefore, the religion question in Nigeria is the contending conflicts between the two religious groups on their relationship with the state.

On the other hand, Christian fundamentalism organised under the foundation of the "born again" ideology involves the knowledge of ones sinful nature, and discarding it and establishing a new relationship with God. "Behold all things have passed away and all things have become new" (II Cor.5:17).

The authority of the Church has totally become separated from political governmental authority as a result of earlier agitations of the Lutherans, Jesuits and Calvinists. Thus every Christian is enjoined to subject himself to the laws, norms and regulations of constituted authority, in so much as it is the sovereign power, whether the person is a Christian or Muslim; as by being obedient to the sovereign, one is actually being obedient to God (Muazzam et al; 2003). Furthermore, Muslims view the canon law and the penal code system handed down after independence as Christian in orientation. Irrespective of the fact that constitutionally the Nigerian state is termed secular and no religion should dominate the other. The basic question that comes to mind is how willing the adherents of the Islamic faith would be, if those of the Christian faith insist on the application of the Jewish Laws and customs, otherwise known as Mosaic laws. The Mosaic laws, just as the shariah legal system was what dictated the behaviours of the citizens and also constituted the political life/affairs of the Jewish State.

In the final analysis alternative strategic innovation would lay in establishing fundamental links between democratic institution and security. The basic premise is that insecurity has flourished in Nigeria owing to the partial failure of the state, weak political authority and a fragile democracy. At the same time, the internal security problems are threatened by acts of corrupt practices, which further erode the credibility of the institutional infrastructure of the country. Consequently, lasting internal order requires not only empowering capacity but also the strengthening of the political system, the criminal justice system and the rule of law in Nigeria (Fwa; 2005).

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's antecedents have created a bleak institutional and psychological environment not conducive for establishing a democratic, strategic and sustainable security agenda. Nigeria's security agenda must hence reflect the conceptual definition that is most appropriate to the circumstances described, since is a country that characterizes state weakness, poor institutions, political exclusion, religious crises, fragile norms related to the rule of law and a lack of a social contract between the state and society (Fwa; 2005:46-47). In a multi-religious state, there is need for a common framework of laws; a social contract also to guide community life (Abdu; 2000:174).

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