

In Search of the Origin of Security Vote

Government particularly the executive arm operates a portfolio called security vote. Until the coming of the present governing system in 1999, security vote was hardly audible in the practice of government. Perhaps the reason for this was not farfetched. First, since the military operated the government for most of the period, security vote was not visible. Second, Nigerians were careful not to express their disapproval with the military's governance openly thus restraining the frequency of the use of security vote. Third, as at the time the military was the government they were "security" personified. Thus there was no need to provide for security vote and/or the secrecy associated with the regime type hid this fact from public scrutiny. Within this line of reasoning, there was so much that transpired under military rule that was shrouded in secrecy and never made public.

What is this security vote? Let me begin by unpacking security vote to enable understanding. Security vote contains two words: security and vote. Security is the independent variable. Vote is the dependent variable. Security vote refers to money set aside for use against the sudden and unexpected breach of what the authority define as 'security'. In this instance and judging from the practice over time, it is the outbreak of crisis and conflict, the breach of peace or whatever the governing elite think it is. Thus security vote is a process of securitisation by setting aside resources for use in the event insecurity occurs. Securitisation represents a situation where the executive construct security as existential threat to a valued referent object in order to handle certain issues in particular ways. How did I get my exposure to security vote?

There were four incidents that brought security vote to my attention. The first two happened in the course of several years but all within the period that began in 1999. The two others happened recently. The first incident was during the senate presidency of Dr. Chuba Okadigbo. I had commenced developing interest in security and one of the issues that caught my attention was security vote. Its importance was growing among members of the executive. Dr. Okadigbo's intervention put security vote on the agenda for me. Dr, Okadigbo was of the view that President Olusegun Obasanjo who presided over a security vote of over N7 billion should have no qualms in using part of the money to fix his ailing senate presidential limousine or even purchase a new one for him. As Dr. Okadigbo argued it was money at the disposal of the President to use as he saw fit and without accounting. This money, he argued, would be replenished as soon as it was spent.

The second incident was when Senator Rasheed Ladoja and Chief Lamidi Adegibu fell out over the use of the governor's over N60 million security votes. Chief Adegibu was displeased that the governor could not give him at least N15 million out of his security vote. Senator Ladoja paid the price for antagonising his godfather who described himself

as the “security” of Oyo state. The third was the face-off between the Speaker, Mr. Yakubu Dogara and the governor of Kaduna state, Mr. Nasiru el-Rufai when the latter complained about the emoluments of legislators and the former challenged the latter to open his book including his security vote for public scrutiny. The face-off between the two ended as Mr. el-Rufai buckled. The fourth incident was the recent call by Professor Iyorwuese Hagher, a former minister and ambassador, that security vote should be abolished. He based his call on the belief that the quest for security vote by the executive was the reason behind conflicts all over the place in Nigeria.

I have asked questions repeatedly on the meaning of security in Nigeria. I have argued that security’s meaning in Nigeria did not come from policy. Security’s meaning came from the defence work of the armed forces. Security’s association with the defence function of the armed forces owed to the armed forces’ intervention in politics, their failure in governance, the death and decay of institutions under their watch, the conflicts and crises their failure in governance unleashed and their intervention using their professional defence skill to manage the crises and conflicts which they then described as restoration of security. This was the enabling environment that gave birth to the present security orientation and knowledge in Nigeria. Nigerians of all walks of life were socialised into this security orientation.

When Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, it was midwife by the military for the retired military officials at the initial stage. While the first democratic dispensation did show knowledge of the need for a security orientation to guide programme with its adoption of the Grand Strategy for National Security, it was short of a policy. However, the document did guide the administration’s definition of security. It was all encompassing. The administration with its head as a former general may have conceived of security from its military orientation and did not see the need for a policy on security. However, the administration saw the need for security vote hence the saga involving Dr. Okadigbo. Security under President Obasanjo retained its military feature as the provision of safety against physical harm. Vote was perhaps associated with the democratic practice of appropriating vote or money for this purpose hence security vote.

As to the origin of security vote, it may not have started with this democratic regime in 1999. Security vote may have been around in the First and Second Republics. Security vote may have been around in the military rule periods even if it was not so pronounced. According to this school of thought, the suppressed nature of crisis and conflict under military rule did not give security vote the type of reputation it has garnered since 1999. This view applied to the First and Second Republics in terms of the proliferation of crisis and conflict that defined defence-inclined security type in Nigeria. In my interaction

with military officials, they had argued that military administrators had security votes which they used for other contingencies.

Nigeria beginning in 1999 came under siege as nationalities took advantage of the open enabling environment created by democracy to express their accumulated and bottled up grievances against government and their neighbours in often violent and confrontational manners. These expressions gave flip to the military's security orientation even as the reasons behind the outburst was the absence of security in political, economic, social, cultural and psychological affairs of most Nigerians. The relevance of security of the military type was at its height.

I argued that most Nigerians were socialised into this security knowledge including the political class. When President Obasanjo handed over power to President Yar'adua it was this practice of security that was top on the agenda as the administration confronted violent social, political and economic outburst all over Nigeria. When President Jonathan took over power, it was a continuation and the escalation of this security practice. Indeed the period was the height of the failure of this security type to address the condition in Nigeria as well as a revelation for one of the reasons behind the continuation of this orientation. It was a chip off Nigeria's evolving civil-military relation where the political class trade-off security and its largesse to the military class's management in return for staying off politics.

The call by Professor Hagher buttressed the purpose behind security vote – resources at the disposal of the executive to manage crisis and since there are crises everywhere. Security vote is a sea of resources that never dries. This, extrapolating from Professor Hagher, makes members of the executive beneficiaries in fomenting conflicts in order to continue to have access to resources without legislative oversight. In an election year and with ever increasing need for resources, chief executives and their "security" advisers benefits from security vote's availability which they then used for other purposes.

Is there a legislative backing for security vote? I have combed the constitution in search of legal backing for security vote to no avail. Perhaps, it is contained in administrative document of some type. In the absence of a security policy which should define security, did security vote emanate as a result of the exigencies of the period? Should the making of security policy not put this security vote into perspective?

For now, the executive, the premier beneficiary of this slush fund, have held on to security vote as supplementary resources available for their use with no obligation for accounting. They consequently have abiding interest in its continuation even if it means perpetuating conflicts all over the place. In this they have the support of the "security" that share in this largesse. The armed forces are the guardians of this security. The resources appropriated

for this security certainly will supplement their huge appetite following their loss of political power. Thus security in the context of security vote has an implied meaning: money voted for use in crisis and conflict. Security is therefore the absence of crisis and conflict.

Should not the democratic process in place since 1999 unveil its own perspective on security in tandem with its governance role as enshrined in the constitution? Should the existence of the illegal portfolio called security vote and the convenience it affords them be the reason to continue the practice of security they inherited from the military? Where is their governance? Where is their security policy? What is the relationship between governance and security? What is the relationship between security and governance? Why should the political class continue with security vote to cause death and destruction for Nigerians?

What is security vote?