

Beginning the Security Conversation in Nigeria

This discourse is an attempt to put a Nigerian perspective to a global security narrative. This is necessary because of the manner in which most Nigerians experience security. There are two related routes to the popularisation of security in Nigeria. The first is from international development. The second arose from development locally within Nigeria.

At the point international development commenced the process of popularising security, the Cold War was at its end and a new world order including the post Cold War post 9/11 worlds were unfolding. They were dominated by what became the clash of civilisations. The reaction to this clash of civilisations was predictably on the security turf.

The point at which security gained prominence within Nigeria was also the height of military misrule of the mid to late 1980s and the 1990s. The military failed in governance and Nigerians reacted to this failure with protest and crime. It was a failure that was marked by institutional decay and in this case the police whose responsibility was to manage crisis of law and order found itself on the cross road. The military had to step in to assist in managing “internal security” with the programmed failure of the police. Domestic development coalesced with development beyond Nigeria’s borders whose collective description was security and insecurity.

Nigerians became familiar with this type of security associated first with the role of the military in governance and second as the bulwark of security in the traditional sense. The role of the military within the security umbrella was that of defence. As a political concept, security transcends defence to include economics, political, social, cultural, psychological etc. Security covers all spheres of human endeavours. This expanded field of security was concealed from the knowledge of Nigerians essentially because like the military that socialise Nigerians into security, Nigerians had not learnt security from any programmed pedagogy.

Just because the military introduced and socialised Nigerians into a phase of security inclined to defence does not make them expert on security. Security is much more complex than their on-the-job knowledge and experience taught them. Like Nigerians, most, if not all, military officials learned security not from any study in school. The on-the-job schooling they had on security was biased towards the defence type.

This is the mindset Nigerians including the military need to change. Indeed only the commencement of programmed pedagogy on security can change this mindset and

lay the foundation of a Nigerian philosophy of security deriving from Nigeria's history, experience and reality.

Security is life. Life itself has no meaning if there is no security. Indeed security is a coin with two sides. The first and the primary side of the coin is the angle of living. This angle of security is from the word "secure" from which security derives. Human beings' first action is to secure their life by feeding, clothing and providing shelter. It is only after this is attained that protecting oneself from physical harm or harming someone physically - the other side of the coin of security - ensued.

As Nigeria's and world lived experience has shown, many positive and negative things are done in the name of security. Security is therefore everywhere - newspapers, radio, speeches, images of what is thought to be security and insecurity making an inquiry into the concept necessary. This is because security affects Nigeria and Nigerians. As an issue worthy of consideration, Nigerians have never given it its deserved attention.

In environment with developed idea on security theoretically and practically, the meaning of security is subjective and elastic implying it could mean what the subject in question says it means. Security is therefore considered a contested concept - a concept without agreeable consensus as to its meaning.

Security, in societies with established tradition and practice of security and with philosophy of security do have a consensus on what it means. This is the case with the United States and Britain. This view does not apply to a country such as Nigeria. While Nigeria seemingly has "established perspective of the practice of security", it was not a perspective that derives from any consensus or theoretical foundation and neither did this evolve from the existence of a philosophy of security.

For the first view i.e. those with established tradition, theory, practice and philosophy of security, the view that there can be no consensus as to its meaning also argues that "most scholars within International Relations (IR) work with a definition of security that involves the allocation of threat to cherished values".¹

Arising from this point, Nigeria does not have any established international relations with interest to pursue and neither scholars and scholarship around the theme of international relations to justify the adoption of a perspective of security that arose from projecting its national interest internationally. To some extent, security does mean different thing to different Nigerians. However, it is possible arising from the source of this security knowledge, to posit that there is a confluence of this meaning of security among Nigerians.

¹ See "Security Studies: An Introduction" by Paul D. Williams in *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Paul D. Williams (ed), London and New York, Routledge, 2008, for most of the ideas expressed in this note.

The confluence of this meaning is what Nigerians learned from the military that socialised them into their view of security. When considered in terms of scholars and scholarship, there is a maze of anarchy that prevails as definition, practice and philosophy of security for Nigeria. This is because, apart from the knowledge derived from the institution (the military) that sold and propagated security and its allied matters to Nigerians – lay people and learned – Nigeria has no security philosophy.

When security is defined in relation to International Relations “security is unavoidably political”. What this implies, according to Lasswell, is that security plays a vital role in deciding who gets what, when, and how in world politics.² This view applies to the seemingly rudderless scenario in Nigeria if we use the hundred of nationalities within its borders as independent states and Nigeria itself as the international scene, the perspective of security that sells here is nationalities or a coalition of nationalities in power acting at every time to pursue interest as they decide who gets what, when, and how in Nigerian politics.

Booth therefore opined, from this perspective, that security studies can thus never be solely an intellectual pursuit because it is stimulated in large part by the impulse to achieve security for “real people in real places”. As far as Nigeria is concerned, security is pursued from an imitative perspective and is not an intellectual pursuit yet. Thus the prevailing pursuit of security is not targeted at real people in real places. As Booth further argued, doing this involves interpreting the past (specifically how different groups thought about and practice security) – understanding the present, and trying to influence the future.³ In order for this happen in Nigeria, the past of security of nationalities must be factored into any construction of a security philosophy for Nigeria (and this is where we will take the history of security from), understanding the present in terms of the practice of security and governance and from there begin to think of what the future of security will be for Nigeria.

If we consider security as an umbrella that houses all things affecting the welfare of human beings, security is a trump-card in the struggle over the allocation of resources. Think, for example, the combined budget government in Nigeria allocate to agencies in “security” as opposed to resources allocated to health, agriculture, education, infrastructure, job creation or development. Nigeria is not yet thinking of security from the umbrella perspective.

To begin to think of security and thus to evolve a Nigerian narrative on security, it is important for the emergence of scholarship and scholars in security that would

² Ibid

³ Ibid

address the four fundamental questions of security. They are what is security? Whose security? What counts as security issue? How can security be achieved?

Doing this entails two approaches. The first is for the government to begin to address governance crisis which would create the enabling environment for the birth of a Nigerian nation out of its nationalities. With the birth of a nation, commonality among Nigerians will give birth to national interest which will become the springboard for the construction of a security Nigerians will identify with. The second approach which would derive from the first is for the expansion of the nascent scholarship in security which will create the theoretical foundation to complete the work in the governance area.

Nigeria and the Four Fundamental Questions of Security

The followings are considered the four basic and fundamental questions forming security studies intellectual core. As the core of security studies, they are also questions that should form the core of the inquiry of policy makers, scholars and students interested and studying security in Nigeria.

The first question is: what is security? Williams noted that this question raises issues about the philosophy of knowledge, epistemology and ontology. It included how do we know things? What phenomena do we think make up the social world? How we should study the social world?⁴

The place to look for answer to these questions is in the origin of security studies, the initial names given to security in the place of origin and the definitions of security. As a subject of professional academic inquiry, security came into being after the Second World War and it was a British-American invention. It was developments after the Second World War particularly the beginning of the Cold War and all it entailed that define security. Security was known as strategic studies in Britain and national security in America. Perhaps, the emergence of the institution of national security adviser, in the United States of America, was an offshoot of this.

The followings are sample of security definitions. Ian Bellany⁵ located security in relative freedom from war, coupled with a relatively high expectation that defeat will not be a consequence of any war that should occur. Jozsef Balazs sees security as determined by the internal and external security of the various social systems, by the extent, in general, to which system identity depends on external circumstances. For him, social security is internal security. The essential function is to ensure the

⁴ Williams, "Introduction", *Security Studies: An Introduction*, 5

⁵ Ian Bellany, "Towards a Theory of International Security", *Political Studies*, 29:1, 1981, 102

political and economic power of a given ruling class, or the survival of the social system and an adequate degree of public security.⁶

In Lippmann's conception, a nation is secure to the extent to which it is not in danger of having to sacrifice core values if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them by victory in such a war.⁷ Wolfers categorises security as objective and subjective. Security, in any objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. Martin defines security as assurance of future well being and Mroz situated security in the relative freedom from harmful threats.⁸ To Ole Waever security is a speech act. According to Waever, it is the utterance itself that is the act. Thus a state representative moves a particular case into a specific area "claiming a special right to use the means necessary to block this development".⁹

Luciani defined national security as the ability to withstand aggression from abroad. To Ullman, a threat to national security is an action or sequence of events that (1) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, nongovernmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state.¹⁰

These definitions, as I argued, were "culture-specific, value laden and development bound." This is because "most if not all of these definitions pointed to International Relations influence and development issues and level of the definers."¹¹ This is because a careful examination of the issues raised and involved in the definitions and a comparison of these with the Nigerian condition will demonstrate that they are not entirely universal in their application. They do not speak to the Nigerian situation.¹²

Where is the Nigerian narrative in terms of the origin of security studies, the name(s) given to security and the definitions of security? These, if they exist – and they do not exist, should be based on Nigeria's culture, value and development level. It

⁶Jozsef Balazs, "A Note on the Interpretation of Security", *Development and Peace*, 6: 1985, 143-50

⁷ Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security in the Post Cold War*, New York: Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1991, 16

⁸ Buzan, *People, States and Fear:...*, 17

⁹ Ole Waever, "Security, the Speech Act: Analysing the Politics of a Word", Unpublished Second Draft, Centre for Peace and Conflict Research, Copenhagen, 1989

¹⁰ See Alan Collins, "Introduction: What is Security Studies" in Alan Collins, ed., *Contemporary Security Studies*, Oxford, University Press, 2007, for Luciani and Ullman's definitions, 3

¹¹ Adoyi Onoja, *Security: A Brief Encounter in Nigeria* (book manuscript, unpublished papers, Department of History, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, 2016)

¹² See my analysis of this in *Ibid*

should be about the people, economy and internal-inwardly focused. It should not be about the state, military and external environment as the sampled definitions.

How did security evolve in Nigeria? Is there a label for security in Nigeria? Are there definitions for security in Nigeria? How come we use national security and strategic studies together here? Going by their origin, what do they mean in Nigeria? Considering the evolution of national security and national security adviser in the United States of America, what is the philosophy behind the creation of the office of national security adviser in Nigeria? What do they mean in the Nigerian environment? These and many more are questions begging for the intervention of Nigeria's security scholars and scholarship assuming we have them.

The second question is: whose security? In America and Britain, the state is the referent of security. Security is about the state, military and external environment. It is this referent object – the state – that the military seek to protect and secured. It was conceived in a climate of anarchy in the international system where states are the primary actors in competition with one another to advance and secure their national interest.

In Nigeria, whose security are we talking about when we talk about security? Is there something to secure? If there is something to secure, what is it? What is the context of this security? Is it local or international? Is it the state? Is it a faction of the state? Whose state are we talking about? Is there a consensus among Nigerians about a state? Is it a faction of the state? Is there a national interest to protect and project? Is Nigeria a nation with national interest? Are Nigerians agreed on a national interest? What is the platform – national or international is this protection and projection done? Is it a factional interest? On what platform is this protected and projected? Nigeria has plenty questions to answer as the country is not there yet.

There are governance issues that require addressing in order to create the room for the emergence of a security orientation almost in tandem with what exist in the developed world. This is because careful examinations of the prevailing security practice demonstrate that Nigeria is imitating and in the process inverting the reality of the developed world which does not exist in Nigeria. The more appropriately course of action is for Nigeria to evolve a security orientation suitable to the Nigeria's history, experience and reality. Only then will scholars and scholarship emerge to articulate this. For now, it is to set the agenda towards addressing governance question.

The third question is: What is a security issue? Once a decision has been made on what and whose security, the next thing is to determine what counts as security

issue for that particular referent. This involves analysing the processes through which threat agendas are constructed. In other words, who decides which referent objects cherished values are threatened, and by what or whom? This is about the politics of constructing threat agendas. Development since the emergence of Donald Trump has necessitated the re-evaluation of these almost settled issues in America's national security.

The Trump presidency reopened the debate on the politics of constructing threat agendas. It is a development that would dominate the Trump era judging from the events since he was inaugurated. Analysts have insinuated a disruption of national security and thus a national security crisis in the United States. The "Muslim ban" debate, the furore over inauguration turnout, the alleged role of Russian intelligence in the election, the allegation that immigrants voted and the pre election relation of Trump's aides with Russia have since deepened the crisis of national security.

The resignation of the National Security Adviser, General Michael Flynn and the decline to accept the offer by the new nominee, another retired general from the navy, were indicative of the crisis. Nor was the crisis helped by the various spin of administration officials including the Counsellor's "alternate fact" proposition and the Whitehouse Press Secretary were indicative of disarray in the administration. Scholars of national security, as the America prefer to call it, are hard at work addressing and articulating these and other related issues as it concerns its impact on national security.

Now situate these scenarios in Nigeria. What counts as security issue for the referent? What is the referent? What threaten the referent? What is threat? How is threat constructed in Nigeria? Who has the responsibility to construct threat? Is there consensus among the security actors on what constitute threat and who construct threat? Is threat dynamic? What is the role of scholars and scholarship in this?

The fourth question is: How can security be achieved? According to Williams, studying security is important because it may help people - as individuals and groups - to achieve it. Asking how security might be achieved implies not only that we know what security means and what it looks like in different parts of the world, but also that there are particular actors which, through their conscious efforts, can shape the future in desired ways. Thus how we think about security and what we think a secure environment would entail will unavoidably shape the security policies we advocate.

Can we discern and reflect these perspectives in the Nigerian environment? Are we agreed on what is security? Are we agreed on whose security? Are we agreed on what is security issue? If there is agreement on all these, there should be agreement

on the method for achieving security. Going by Williams' submission, we have not studied security in order to help individuals and groups to achieve it. We have not consciously examined security in different parts of the world to provide Nigeria with the chance to evolve its own narrative of security. Neither have we taken note of actors whose conscious efforts can shape the future in desired ways. Nigerians have not thought about security and what a secure environment would entail let alone having these shape the security policies Nigeria advocate. We have no national security policy to drive other policies in Nigeria.

It is important to begin to engage with these four questions at all levels – debate, scholarship and policy. These four questions and providing answers to them are fundamental for scholars and students of security in Nigeria. They are instrumental in understanding security studies from the classical world. They are fundamental in evolving a Nigerian narrative of security which, from the foregoing, should be different because Nigeria's history, experience and reality differs from the American and British history, experience and reality that informed the evolution of modern security studies. Modern security and security studies is a piece of British-American history laden with their culture, value and development.

Nigeria has no narrative of its own security in this yet.