

"Security", "National Security Council" and the Politics of Ethnic Representation

I was tipped off to write this piece by two social media posts on one of the Whatsapp groups I belonged. The first post one was captioned "we have met the yearnings, aspirations of Nigerians – President Buhari". The second post was "Nnamdi Kanu: No Igbo man in Buhari's security council – Ezeife".

These two captions represented the visions of Nigeria as understood by these two individuals. The first individual is the sitting president of Nigeria. The second individual was the former governor of Anambra State.

For me and in the context of my pursuit of the security conversation in Nigeria, the two issues associated with these personalities, were hued from the same pot. The pot in question is S E C U R I T Y under representative rule setting. This is opposed to "security" under military rule setting. The constituents of the question includes what should constitute security as opposed to what was and is security; whose security as opposed to whose was and is security; what should constitute security issues as distinct from what was and is security issues and; how should security be achieved as opposed to how was and is security achieved. These questions should be examined under democratic rule framework and in tandem with democratic rule governance mandate within the context of the security or secure hued from these.

While President Muhammadu Buhari GCFR was busy congratulating self for meeting most of the expectations and aspirations of Nigerians, Aisha Buhari, the President's wife, looking radiant and without the demeanour of one who was contrite, apologised to Nigerians for the disappointed that her husband's administration turned out to be in the last seven almost eight years. For the President's households and with the possible exception of the President – the quintessential ostrich perpetually covering his face in the sand as the saint without any trace of "corruption" on his name – the last almost eight years was grandiosely rewarding in most if not all ramifications judging from their individual and collective net worth (asked the embattled former acting chairman of the financial crimes police) at the expense of the Nigerian treasury and the security of most Nigerians.

The views of the President and the First Lady, as the First Family, represented two different realities. They were not in agreement on their stewardship for most Nigerians. However, their fortunes, in properties and funds, reputed to be in trillions of naira, drew attention, if any attention was required, to what is truly SECURITY or SECURE on the one hand and on the other hand the extreme deprivations their presence in government and governance increased for most Nigerians pushing them into crisis and conflict aside from the crisis and conflict they orchestrated to oil the political economy of what was and is "security".

The First Family and their government, in the wake of the unending-deprivation engendered crisis and conflict and the orchestrated crisis and conflict in search of "security" and "security vote", provided fund for the purchase of guns and boots as "security" or "secure", for the rest of Nigerians. The funds so generously approved by Mr President for "security" over and over again included those at the level of statutory annual budgets, supplementary appropriation budgets, "security vote", individual bosses of the military, intelligence and law enforcement requests and from the National Security Council recommendations. Most of the funds ended up inside the pockets of elected/appointed political class and the elite of the military, intelligence and law enforcement.

The First Family, their friends, the elected/appointed political class and the elites of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) and their families and friends secured themselves using money (money in the pocket is security or wellbeing in all of its forms) and pushed the ill-equipped, ill-motivated and insufficient and weary soldiers, airmen, sailors, intelligence operatives and law enforcement officials to the rest of Nigerians as "security".

Nigeria's Court of Appeal discharged the leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, held and detained by the government for a number of years. Nigeria's "National Security Council" (NSC) apparently chaired by Mr President met to consider the "security" and/or "national security" implication of the Court's decision. Prior to convening the meeting, the Ministry of Justice had indicated that the decision of the Court did not acquit Mazi Kanu and that for reasons of "national security", Mazi Kanu will remain in detention. The NSC was convened and the decision was taken that Mazi Kanu would not be released. This was the ground for Dr Chukwuemeka Ezeife's comment.

At the centre of the theatrics is the question of SECURITY. It is not the question of what was, is and should be security in the light of the changes brought about by the transition from military rule to civil elected rule in 1999. What was and is security is one of the relics of the old ideas, institutions and persons built by the military during military rules that should be deconstructed, reconstructed and/or constructed under civil rule by the legislatures in order to create what should be security.

Under what was and is "security", "security" is the name and work of the executive agencies of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. The focus of this "security" is the state or the ruling coalitions. "Security" is anything and everything deemed to be threatening to the state. The use and deployment of the resources of these agencies to restore order is "security". This is the old order of "security" primed to benefiting few

persons in the country in a governance system aimed at everybody. The National Security Council was birthed under this construct of "security". In terms of its mandate, there is NO demarcation between security and defence. There is therefore NO difference between the National Security Council which works around the subject of "security" and the National Defence Council which works around the subject of defence. The reason for this is not farfetched. The military and military regimes made no distinction between security and defence. They are synonymous and used interchangeably.

I first drew attention to the National Security Council when retired Navy Commodore Kayode Olofinmoyin attributed the unbalance numerical ethnic representation on the Council for the lack of peace in Nigeria. According to Commodore Olofinmoyin, of the eleven members of the NSC, nine were from the north and only two from the south. I argued then that the assertion brought to the public agenda the need for a security philosophy or nature, meaning and purpose of security in tandem with representative rule system and mandate for governance. With this security philosophy in place, the National Security Council's mandate will be clearly spelt out and generated from this philosophy.

At present, there is no philosophy or nature, meaning and purpose for the prevalent "security" type other than the name and work of the agencies of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. The construct of Nigeria's National Security Council took its cue from this conception of "security" and above all else imitated the outward appearance of the United States of America's idea with the exception of the "public security" assigned to the Nigeria's version of the NSC as its mandate.

The United States of America's idea of National Security and the institution called the National Security Council are contained in the widely publicised and available National Security Act of 1947. What is national security is located beyond the borders of the United States hence the symbiotic relations between national security team and foreign policy team. The conducts of the United States of America, in the pursuit of its national security, anywhere and everywhere in the world, represent one aspect of the widely canvassed national security. This is exemplified by the use of national security logistics made up of the military, intelligence and law enforcement to defend the state, the agent and agency of national security, on the international arena, in the quest for national security.

Nigeria's idea of "security", "national security" and the National Security Council were products of the optics presented by the National Security Act (NSA) of 1947, the legislation birthing national security, in the United States of America. A careful study of the content of the NSA leaves no doubt about the United States' war readiness in the event America's national security was threatened. The legislation did not say what this national security was. It required the reading of America's history from the Pioneers in 1617 to the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945 to know this national security. However, the legislation provided all of the institutions that will fight to defend this

national security – the military, intelligence and law enforcement. This is the optics that sold “security” and/or “national security” to Nigeria under military rule.

In the United States of America and for the United States of America, national security is the economic, strategic and market resources scattered in different parts of the world to which the state pursues for the sake of Americans and to which the logistics for accessing, protecting and advancing national security is provided by America’s military, intelligence and law enforcement.

The National Security Council (NSC) is one of the institutions created by the National Security Act. The NSC sits atop all issues pertaining to economic, strategic and market resources vital to the United States all over the world. The NSC monitors these issues and others round the clock and ensures that they are safe and accessible to the United States. The United States’ NSC, unlike the Nigerian clone, monitors countries on the basis of their economic, strategic and market resources contribution to America’s wellbeing or security and has experts in all fields constantly combing the areas in all spheres.

One example of its national security concern was the recent cut in oil production announced by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The NSC spokesperson who also serves as the Coordinator of Strategic Communications at the NSC in the White House, Rear Admiral John Kirby (rtd), issued statement critical of Saudi Arabia’s role in facilitating the development. The NSC’s schedule and office is full and busy and works round the clock to guarantee America’s national security. This is unlike the Nigerian clone with an ambiguous mandate called “public security” and meets on ad-hoc basis to detain persons against the directives of the courts and/or to approve funds for “security”.

This idea of “security” as designation for the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement and the accompanying NSC’s “public security” mandate are out of date in the present democracy framework. They were not made with the democracy framework in mind. Thus this “security” and the “public security” of the NSC failed and will continue to fail. In other words and going by the submission of Commodore Olofinmoyin before and Dr Ezeife recently, this “security” and “public security” will only work if there are ethnic representation in the Council. To this extent, there will not be proxy representation of ethnic groups or other ethnic groups sitting in the Council on behalf of other groups. All ethnic groups, by their submissions, should be represented in the NSC in order for peace to exist in Nigeria.

This was the idea playing out in Dr Eziefe’s mind when he argued that the Council’s decision to detain Mazi Kanu sailed through because there was no Igbo representation. We live in the era of democracy where politics is the solution to most if not all problems. Their position demonstrated the need to resolve the ambiguity of inherited ideas, persons and institutions formed in the course of the prolonged military rule and military rule socialisation.

Of these ideas, the central one is SECURITY. Under the military rule perspective that govern this "security", its utility is limited and against the tenets of representative rule. If defined, charted and governed under civil rule framework and governance philosophy, security's utility covers every aspect of human endeavour. Security or secure is the vision and the mission of civil rule. The provision of a nature, meaning and purpose or philosophy for security by Nigeria's legislatures will engender the emergence and governance all of this security's constituents including the National Security Council.

In the present perspective of "security", the National Security Council is found in **Chapter VI: The Executive, Part 1 B: Establishment of Certain Federal Executive Bodies**, in the 1999 Constitution as amended. The membership of the Council is contained in K 25 National Security Council. The membership comprised the president, vice president, chief of defence staff, ministers of internal affairs, defence, foreign affairs, national security adviser, inspector general of the police and such other persons the president may in his discretion appoint.

These are the persons constituting the Council. They are in the Council by the virtue of the position they occupied and not because of their ethnicity even if ethnicity/religion/region featured as criteria for their appointment into these positions. Thus on the basis of the list, the president is Fulani/northwest/Muslim; the vice president is Yoruba/Christian/southwest, chief of defence staff is Igbo/Christian/southsouth, minister of internal affairs is Yoruba/Muslim/southwest, minister of defence is Fulani/Muslim/northwest, minister of foreign affairs is Igbo/Christian/southeast, national security adviser is Kanuri/Muslim/northeast and inspector general of police is Fulani/Muslim/northeast.

In view of the mandate of the NSC – "public security" – and in the context of "security" as the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement, the presence of the ministry of foreign affairs makes little or no meaning except in further confirming the imitation that the NSC idea was from the United States model. I mentioned the relationship between national security team and foreign policy team of the United States. Perhaps this was the reason for the inclusion of the ministry of foreign affairs in the Nigerian NSC.

Based on the submission of Commodore Olofinmoyin and Dr Ezeife, the present composition of the Council is disproportionately in favour of the North principally the North-East and North-West in terms of ethnicity/religion/region. The Southwest and the Southeast have two representations each – the vice president and minister of internal affairs and the minister of foreign affairs and the chief of defence staff. Apparently, in Dr Ezeife's calculation, the chief of defence staff does not represent the Igbo interest. The chief of defence staff is Ika Igbo (Read Uche Okwukwu: "Defence Chief, Irabor and Igbo origin controversy", <https://dailypost.ng/2021/01/31/uche-okwukwu-defence-chief-irabor-and-igbo-origin-controversy/>) from Agbor in Delta State. Delta State is not part

of the southeast as a region synonymous with the Igbo. This is not the first time this distinction would come since the enthronement of democracy in 1999. Nigeria's northwest used this exclusion clause during the presidency of Obasanjo when all of the services chiefs were northern Muslims and Christians from the Middle Belt. The North essentially the northwest did not think the Middle Belt which is called North Central was northern enough to represent them.

In the argument of Olofinmoyin and Ezeife, the rest of the ethnic groups in Nigeria do not matter when it comes to representation in the Council. This is for two reasons. The first reason is because they – Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani – supposedly can stand in for their interests reminiscence of the division of Nigeria along the colonially designated regions tied to the three ethnic groups. The second reason is because "security" and the Council are all about the so-called three groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.

The mandate of the National Security Council is contained in **K 26**: "The Council shall have power to advise the President on matters relating to **public security** including **matters relating to any organisation or agency established by law for ensuring the security** of the Federation." The term "public security" did not define anything else aside from the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement which also falls under defence and thus covered by the National Defence Council. Yet there is attempt to designate the two – the National Security Council and the National Defence Council – as distinct and different under civil rule whereas there was no distinction and dividing line between security and defence under military rule.

In the section on Schedules and specifically in the **Second Schedule Legislative Powers Part 1 Exclusive Legislative List**, of the Items mentioned, there was nothing on "security". There was Item Number 17 "defence" and Item Number 45 "police and other government security services established by law". How do one explain the absence of "security" on the list of Items on the Exclusive Legislative List in the 1999 Constitution as amended, when there is a National Security Council supposedly saddled with "public security" which, itself derived from "security", is for the creators and compilers of the 1999 Constitution to explain.

The fact remain that there is plenty that is wrong with the carry over "security" from the military rule era into civil rule era. This includes the numerous constituents of this "security". There is need to address this "security" under civil rule framework which includes governance or the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigerians which the Constitution saddle civil elected authority with the task to deliver. This can only happen with the creation of civil rule security philosophy and constitution.

As long as we continue to function with the 1999 Constitution and the ideas, persons and institutions cooked under military rule, "security" will continue to serve the interest of the elected/appointed political class and their military, intelligence and law enforcement advisers. After all this is the vision and mission of the 1999 Constitution or Decree Number 24 which the departing military bequeathed to the succeeding civil rule. The Constitution is the military's vision of a Nigeria without them as the governing authority.

There is need to distinguish security and defence under civil rule. This can only come with defining, charting and governing security. This is because, in the context of civil rule setting, security and defence cannot and should not mean the same thing. Security is the FOREST under civil rule setting. Defence is a TREE inside the FOREST.

To this extent and once security is cloth with philosophy, the assertion by Edward Kolodzie that not all political issues are security issues and all security issues are political issues, although set in the context of the developed world milieu, when viewed in the Olofinmoyin and Ezeife contexts, will begin to have meaning in Nigeria's theory and practice of security.