

Conceptualising the Nature of Non-State Actors in Security Management in Nigeria¹

By

Adoyi ONOJA²

Nasarawa State University, Keffi

onojaa@yahoo.com

<http://www.adoyionoja.org.ng>

Introduction

In its modern forms, the entity called non-state and non-state actor is the creation of the western civilisation. It is embedded in their ideas, persons and institutions. To this extent, what constitute the nature of non-state space and non-state actors owe their origin in the western cultures and traditions.

While largely a western creation, it is significant to underscore the fact that the idea of non-state space and non-state actor is not alien to the African cultures and traditions. This is owing to the fact that the spaces and actors called non-state is the opposite of the spaces and actors called state. The Continent has its share of state and non-state systems. The phenomenon of non-state space and non-state actor is common to most organised community in every culture the world over. This is if we adopt the perspective that define non-state space as any space outside state-controlled/inadequately-controlled space and non-state actor as any actor outside state-controlled actor. However, in its modern reconceptualisation, non-state space and non-state actor carries western imprimatur for the most part.

Until 1989 but effectively beginning in 1991, the world was bipolar with the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA) contending for the dominance of their ideas, persons and institutions. Under this condition, interactions and relations across most spectrums of human endeavours were governed by countries subscribing to either socialism or capitalism. These were the two sanctioned state-based spaces available in the world. There was a third space called non-aligned space. In retrospect, the non-aligned space existed as a mere wish as most member countries were clearly aligned to the Soviet communist space or America's capitalist space.

The end of the Cold War and the emergence of the post-Cold War worlds significantly reconfigure the spaces including limiting this to one dominant unipolar world with multiple

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² Dr. Adoyi ONOJA is a professor of African history with specialisation in security, history of security and security studies, comparative security and security studies, governance, law enforcement, media and Middle Belt of Nigeria. He is currently on sabbatical leave at the National Institute for Security Studies, Lower Usuma Dam, Bwari.

centres of power³ and numerous formidable non-state spaces and non-state actors. The latter sought to fill the voids left behind and, in some cases, created by the sudden end of the Cold War in the lives and institutions across different countries.

The beginning of the push of the triumphant West to spread capitalism and democracy all around the world created opportunity for the emergence of non-state spaces and non-state actors. In the years since Nigeria was compelled to enthrone democracy as the system of government, one noticeable setback is the lack of democratisation of ideas, persons and institutions. There is the need to plant, water, grow and tend democracy before, during and particularly after its enthronement.

There were several non-state actors in the pro-democracy project, governance enhancement and in the promotion of economic, social, cultural and religious rights all over the place. Generally, non-state actors have continued to emerge to interface between state actors and issues in the economic, political, social, cultural, religious, environmental etc. spheres.

In Search of Nature, Non-State Actors, Security and Management

What comes to the mind when we talk about "nature", "non-state actors", "security" and "management" in this discourse?

A close examination of the theme of Executive Intelligence Management Course 18 from which the topic of this discourse was derived alluded to what ached and is aching Nigeria from the perspective of the Department of State Services. The concerns constitute the constituents of the work of ministries, departments and agencies of government on the one hand and on the other hand the agencies I described as the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE). They fall under the state space and thus state actors.

The key terms of the title include non-state actors, nature and security management. Of these, non-state actor is the independent variable. The dependent variables are nature, security and management. The focus is therefore the nature of non-state actors in security management.

The word "nature" comes from the Latin word *natura*. This refers to "birth" and "essential qualities". As far as this discourse is concerned, the latter or essential qualities sufficed. Nature refers to basic, inherent features, character and/or qualities of something. There are other similar words that suffice for nature to include essence, sum, substance, character, identity, complexion and kind. Nature is thus the inherent character or constitution of something and in this discourse, non-state actors. Arising from this, the NATURE of non-state actors in

³ Read Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: the Structure of the International Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003

security management includes the abstract inherent character, constitution, essential qualities, basic features and what they are made of.

The term non-state is a compound word which combines two words. They are "non" and "state". The prefix "non" is derived from Latin "non" which means "not" and the "state" originates from the Latin "status" which signifies "condition" or "circumstances" and in the political context refers to a sovereign nation-state.

The "non" means "not" and "state" means a sovereign political entity. Therefore "non-state" means "not a state" and refers to an entity/institution/organisation that is not affiliated to/with or governed by a recognised territorially-based government. The usage of non-state was popularised in international relations from where it permeated countries particularly in the third or developing world where it is more pronounced in local politics than international affairs. In international relations, non-state actors refer to groups like corporations, non-governmental organisations, rebel groups and other non-state groups cutting across different spheres of human endeavours that operate independently from any national government. The designation non-state actor is used when referring to entities that may have significant influence on international affairs even as it is not officially recognised as sovereign state.

While this is one of the nature of developed world non-state actors whose terrain of operation is the international scene's politics and in relation to the affairs of the developed world, in the developing world and in Africa in particular, non-state actors are local in nature and thus confined within particular countries; non-state actors often dabble into different issues areas particularly where there is funding; they are often off-shoots of the internationally branded types; they are largely funded by these international types and/or major developed⁴ and discerning developing developed countries with issues to pursue in these countries and on the international spheres.

Thus, we defined non-state actors are quasi profit and non-profit entities occupying governed and ungoverned spaces representing interests and pursuing issues of supposedly public goods that reflect the gamut of societal concerns. They cut across non-governmental organisations, armed groups and others in the media, labour, religion, lobby, right/liberation movements, aid agencies etc. They have grown and widened in terms of the issues/interests' areas they occupy and have continue to proliferate as engendered by the demands of the time. This is the case in Nigeria and within the civil rule democracy frameworks.

⁴ It has just emerged that the recently disbanded United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded numerous non-state actors in Nigeria including the non-state armed group called Boko Haram. This is not surprising and it is not peculiar to the Democratic Party in the United States. It should be noted that the making of crises, conflicts and wars, in far flung territories of the world, play major role in the political economy of the United States of America and it would be naïve for anyone to think the Republican Party are better in this respect because of the ongoing revelations. See Adoyi ONOJA, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1GzgoGyrAi/> 18:02:2025

In Nigeria, security has remained firmly ensconced in the tradition and worldview of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) anchored on decades of military rule. This is in spite of the onset of civil rule democracy and the need to deconstruct and reconstruct ideas, persons and institutions in tandem with this enabling environment.

Most Nigerians particularly the highly lettered among them chose to retain the conception of security as the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. They justified this retention on the ground that they grew up knowing⁵ security as used exclusively in this context. This was part of their socialisation under military rule environment on the one hand and on the other hand the knowledge the gleaned from the Cold War environment that projected this phase of security internationally. They chose to retain this view even when it is within their professional calling to investigate and interrogate security's etymologies, epistemologies, philosophies and histories generally and in relation to the genre in Nigeria.

In Nigeria's 64 years history, Nigeria has never had a security policy. A policy set out to ask and answer four questions on a particular issue. They straddle policy or vision and strategy or mission. For security and in particular security studies, P.D. Williams calls this the four fundamental questions. They are what is security, whose security, what is a security issue and how can security be achieved. The first three questions represented those of policy and the last represented strategy. In the annals of governance of ideas in Nigeria and particularly security governance (SG) – and this is in the absence of the governance of security (GoS) – there is a security strategy⁶ even when there is no legislated security policy.

In the absence of a legislated security policy, the 1999 Constitution⁷ provided a guide in this direction. There are fifteen mentions of security in the Constitution. Of these, there are two defining provisions on security in the Constitution. They are Section 5 subsection 5 and Section 14 subsection 2B. The rest of the provisions refer to noun or name and verb or work. The references to security in the Constitution are descriptive and associational.⁸ As a result of this, the operational definition of security is the name and work of the executive agencies of the military, intelligence and law enforcement.

⁵ The view that security refers to armed bearing agencies and nothing else was that of Professor Sadiq Abba and Professor (Ambassador) Abdullahi Shehu. They made this position known in their response to my attempt to reconceptualise security since the idea was undefined, uncharted and ungoverned in policy and legislation particularly within the civil rule governance framework. Their positions emerged in the course of the faculty meeting at the National Institute for Security Studies, Bwari, 2025.

⁶ Nigeria has a National Security Strategy first compiled in 2014 which was reviewed in 2019 and is currently being reviewed after the end of its five years shelf life. See Office of the National Security Adviser, *National Security Strategy (NSS)*, Abuja, 2014 and 2019

⁷ The content of security in the 1999 Constitution provides clues as to on the first three questions of policy on security. See Federal Republic of Nigeria, *1999 Constitution as Amended*, Abuja; See Adoyi ONOJA, *The 1999 Constitution and the Fifteen (15) References to "Security"* (Monograph 7), Jos, Eiwā Press, 2021

⁸ Adoyi ONOJA, *The 1999 Constitution and the Fifteen (15) References to "Security"* (Monograph 7)...

If we go by the constitutional provision of security as the name and work of the executive agencies of the MILE as this paper's operational definition, it leaves defining the "management" aspect of "security" that concerns the "non-state actors". The word management comes from manage and it is to be in charge and/or to own and run something. Thus management is the coordination and administration of tasks to achieve a goal. This includes setting the organisation's strategy arising from its policy and coordinating the efforts of staff (formal and informal) to accomplishing these objectives through application of available resources.

In relation to this discourse and narrowing security to the name and work of the MILE, the nature of the non-state actors in security management is indirect and associational. They are either working positively i.e., reducing and/or negatively i.e., increasing whatever constitutes security issues for the governments and the agencies with the mandate to address them. This is depending on where their interests and those of their sponsors reside.⁹ To this end, they contribute directly and/or indirectly to the sustenance of the political economy of "security" thesis¹⁰ of the last two decades' Nigeria.

On the Political Economy of "Security" in Nigeria

Why has this security, in spite of occupying the front row seat, in Nigeria's annual and supplementary appropriations of several years, defied all efforts toward the resolution of what it described as security challenges in Nigeria?

The answer to this question may rest on the thesis of the existence of the political economy of security embracing the political class, the elite leadership of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) and now the non-state actors with interests in security. It is one possible explanation to the unending persistence of the crisis that has become the basis for the thriving industry called the non-state actors.

There is a duality in the execution of this "security" in the lives of Nigerians. The civic face and practice of "security" which played out in the public domain i.e. the deployment of boots into conflict areas and for the benefit of most Nigerians also concealed the hidden and primordial face of this civic "security" i.e. the siphoning of fund meant for this "security" which proceeds provide wellbeing¹¹ in all of its forms for the elites of politics, the MILE and those behind the non-state space.

⁹ The USAID allegation of sponsoring non-state actors including non-state armed groups and the statement credited to the Chief of Defence Staff on the workings of non-state actors are indicative of this.

¹⁰ The thesis refers the unwritten understanding between Nigeria's political elite and the leadership elite of the MILE which advances and protects their interests in what is called "security" in the unfolding Fourth Republic. In the original conception of my thesis of the making of a political economy of "security" (Read Adoyi ONOJA, *The Making of A Political Economy of "Security" in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* (Monograph 11), Jos, Eiwa Press, 2024), I had initially anchored this thesis on the elites of politics and the MILE. With this new insight, I am reviewing the thesis to include non-state actors particularly the non-state armed groups as the third leg of this unwritten alliance on "security".

¹¹ I defined security as wellbeing of the individual in all of its forms in tandem with security's founding etymology, history and philosophy on the one hand and on the other hand, civil rule democracy and governance framework. See Adoyi ONOJA, *Security: A Policy Note for Nigeria* (Monograph 5), Jos, Eiwa Press, 2020 and _____ "SECURITY": *the Known Unknown in Nigeria*, Jos, Eiwa Press, 2022. This definition chimed with Booth's *Theory of World Security* thesis in Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

The politics of “security” is two dimensional. The first dimension commenced in a subtle form with military interventions in politics and grew incrementally over the course of several years. Thus, following the years of the military’s interventions, they left the psycho-social and social-psychology of the political class badly and seemingly irreparably bruised on the one hand and on the other hand those of most Nigerians compromised. Consequently, most disgruntled politicians and Nigerians persistently and consistently viewed the military as fallback position in the never-ending governance woes that characterised the affairs of the elected political class. In their psyches, the military remained a potentially destabilising force and an alternative government in waiting. The military held this veto power because of the political class’s dearth of ideology and class consciousness.

There was an orchestrated state of nature environment created by both the military inside the 1999 Constitution they bequeathed to this Republic and in the never-ending abysmal governance or the perennial ineffective and inefficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigerians by the political class at every level. These two developments represented a permanent death nail on the coffin of the Nigerian Police’s ability to function effectively within civil rule context. The militarised environment in place required the consistent presence of the military which enabled the political economy of “security” beginning effectively with the Yar’adua administration and reaching a crescendo, sadly, ironically and disgracefully though, under the watch of the administration of retired army general, Muhammadu Buhari.

The second dimension sought to allay the fears of the political and military classes by making provisions to protect their individual and collective interests. The eternal dread by the political class, of the military’s destabilising potentials, was addressed by assuaging the military class’s feeling of the loss of political power through the provision of unfettered access to fund using the “security” portfolio. The “security” portfolio benefits the political class and the elite of the military.¹²

Nigeria’s undefined, uncharted and ungoverned “security” is fed by the enduring and eternal crises and conflicts in the polity occasioned by the orchestrated poor governance of all the tiers of governments on the one hand and on the other hand the request for fund to address the resultant “security” challenges. Most of the discourses and interventions on “security” challenges including the occasional calls by non-state actors for the declaration of state of emergence ended up with one solution: fund and more fund, to fund security. The fund ended up settling and defraying the cost of the military’s loss of its vast infrastructures and investments in politics following the return of power to civilians on the one hand and on the other hand provide the political class with limitless slush fund to fund their activities.

¹² This is the fulcrum of the thesis of a political economy of “security” at work. See Ađoyi ONOJA, *The Making of a Political Economy of “Security” in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic* in Ibid

The presence of the military in most States of the federation is a welcome development in the scheme of the politics and political economy of "security". One of the biggest sources of unaccounted and unaudited slush fund for the political class in the states comes from the portfolio called "security". The military's presence justified the endless request for "security vote", the need to provide and replenish equipment, logistics and welfare to the regular detachments and to the special operations' detachments in these States. They helped the States' executives and legislatures to valorise the existential significance of Section 14 Subsection 2B.

The 1999 Constitution began life as Decree Number 24. It was a military law drafted by the military for their strategic survival-plus strategy post military rule. It was a constitution made in the image of the military. The implication, for civil rule enabling environment, is that the content of the constitution required reconstruction in the image of civil rule democracy and governance frameworks. In Section 14 Subsection 2B, the reference to "security" is a reference to the military and to some extent the intelligence and law enforcement.

This "security" as the primary purpose of government put the military's name and work as priority number one for consideration before other items including the deliberately ignored "welfare" part of the Article. This was the vision of "security" created in the image of the military. This vision was strategically place to benefit these institutions as their volarisation by the political class demonstrated over the years. The political class, by their actions and inactions, engendered the environment that prioritised this "security" in appropriation.

The non-state actors first made their significant debut and impact during military rule. They have since become a significant feature of everyday life under the civil rule and democracy environment of Nigeria. In their different types, perspectives, interests and the issues they pursue, their activities have either reduce positively and/or increase negatively the terrain of security as their contribution to its management. To this end, they are playing associational roles in furthering the political economy of security.

The Nature of Non-state Actors in Security Management

In operationalising the Nigeria type non-state actors as quasi profit and non-profit entities occupying governed and ungoverned spaces representing interests and pursuing issues supposedly of public goods that reflect the gamut of societal concerns, they exhibit certain qualities.

One, their activities are mostly not grounded in local realities emanating from issues of indigenous social, economic, political, cultural or environmental needs. Two, most of them are driven and guided by and from the developed countries.

Three and arising from two, they are largely funded from abroad. Four, most of the non-state actors are eclectic in the agenda they pursue. Their operating mantra is they go where funding is available. Five, they have entrenched interests in the continuation of the issues that keeps

them in business. This includes the conflict economy. This essentially explained their nature in security management.

In the first place, they can be veritable sources of information and intelligence in the theatres of conflict. They have the capacity to go where the regular state institutions cannot go because of the need for their kind of services by both the state actors and the non-state actors. However, this attributes often put them on the receiving end of both belligerents.

In the second place, as part of their nature, especially the humanitarian types amongst them, disposes them to intervening where the state cannot or is limited due to the activities of the non-state armed groups. They have provided services in the health, sanitation, water and education areas and intervene in condition of missing persons. Their effort can contribute to stabilisation, peace building and conflict resolution. In some cases, their effort can complicate and worsen these conditions depending on their interests and those of their sponsors. They have served and can serve in monitoring issues of human rights, ethical conducts of conflicting parties and conflict prevention.

In the third place, they, particularly the non-state armed group types, represent criminal organisations. Their activities seek to undermine the capacity of the state especially in ungoverned and sparsely governed spaces whether in tangible or intangible terms. Consequently, they increase the threats to lives and properties. They engage in illicit activities such as illegal mining, arms smuggling, human trafficking and recruitment of minors. This is in the bid to fund their operations. Since they have capacity to challenge state authority, they can destabilise governments and increase the absence of peace and development in the communities.

In the fourth place, some of the non-state actors facilitate peace keeping and conflict resolution thus playing roles in security management. They also facilitate capacity building in the different areas particularly the foreign types. They can assist in building the capacity of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. They do this by providing specialised training, resources and expertise particularly in areas where there are deficiencies in managing conflict type security.

In the fifth place and consequent on the overstretched resources and/or the glaring inadequacies of the presence of the military, intelligence and law enforcement detachments in certain areas, non-state groups have taken it upon themselves to fill the void, in these areas. Some non-state actors have constituted themselves into local militias and community policing outfits for the protection of community members. They can support and have supported state institutions and in other conditions they can and have replaced state institutions. As community and religious leaders, they play vital role in promoting dialogue and peace in times of conflicts. However, in some cases, community/traditional and religious groups have been

involved in exacerbating sectarian violence, especially in regions where there is competition between ethnic and religious groups for resources and political influence.

In the sixth place, non-state actors have stepped into the fray to address digital threats. Private companies have worked with government institutions and/or in the absence of these state infrastructures, have worked on their own to defend and protect against hacking, data breaches and cyber-terrorism and thefts. Organisations that own critical infrastructures have moved to work alongside state institutions and/or on their own to protect these facilities from cyber and physical attacks. In other cases, they have used their expertise to undermine the state and challenge its legitimacy in different ways.

In the seventh place, state and non-state actors can partner in a public-private partnership to address challenges arising from threats to persons and infrastructures. This they can do by pooling resources, sharing intelligence and expertise. This is especially the case in countering terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and cybercrimes and in emergency conditions.

Conclusion

Non-state actors have come a long way since their debut first as part of the effort at taming military rule aberration and restoring civil rule and second as a constant presence in the efforts at civilianisation and democratisation of ideas, persons and institutions. As demonstrated in their nature, they can and have contributed directly and indirectly to security management. This is not only the security type peculiar to the name and work of the MILE. The advancement of individual and group wellbeing which their activities, in the different spheres engender, constitute aspect of security or freeing persons from care, providing persons something which secure, creating condition of being secure for persons and/or reducing or eliminating feeling of apprehension in persons.

In what is the civil rule democracy underway in Nigeria, non-state actors have manifested and will continue to manifest positive and negative roles affecting security management whether security is the type focused on the work of the MILE and/or the all-encompassing type that engender wellbeing in all of its form. While urging the government to find a mid-way to harnessing their positive potentials and curtailing their negative tendencies, it is incumbent on the non-state actors to look in-ward in the ideas they leverage their activities on including security, their sources of funding and the issues they promote, in the light of recent developments.