

Matters Arising for Nigeria in President Trump America First National Security Strategy

The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) of Nigeria should get hold of President Trump's America First National Security Strategy that was recently released. This is unlike the Nigeria's ONSA's own Strategy which would have been labelled "top secret" "confidential" and "need-to-know" etc. President Trump's America First Strategy is on the internet and available at the cost of one's data only.

The "secret", "top secret", "confidential" and "need-to-know" are terms typical of the operational worldview associated with defence in the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE). This is different from security and most certainly different from Nigeria's obsession with national security. Nigeria understands and does defence and not security and/or national security. Nigeria does not understand and does not do security and/or national security. Nigeria's imitation and copying disposition enable it to confuse security/national security and/or with defence and defence and/or with security/national security.

It is important the ONSA get hold of America First as it contains useful lessons for them as the grapple with managing their national security for the administration and the herculean task of compiling a believable Strategy for Nigeria. Nigeria's Strategy is long overdue.

The ONSA should deploy studying, thinking, observing and comparing (STOC) to the America First Strategy in order to discern Nigeria's place in it. They should comb the Strategy outside inside and inside outside in search of the myriads of lacuna in their own and perhaps get to the bottom of the construct of not just the strategy but also the framework on which the strategy would operate. The framework should be the will and the buy-in of most Nigerians on security which will birth national security within Nigeria's history, experience and reality (HER) and under civil rule democracy and governance. For now, Nigeria's National Security Strategy, beginning with the 2014 edition, has never had a framework. Thus, the Strategies have had the unique distinction of been empty and unusable stand-alone Strategies.

President Trump's America First Strategy came less than one year into his second term as the president of the United States of America. The 33-page Strategy WALK the Trump TALKS on what is Americans and America's national security. So far, the Strategy lives up to the expectations of Trump's mission for Americans and America.

This is in sharp contrast with Nigeria where the National Security Strategy expired in 2024. What this imply, if we are to believe the Office of the National Security Adviser who are the makers of the Strategy, is that there is no strategy guiding the pursuit of national security for this administration. The Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), under the National Security Adviser (NSA), who solely runs national security for Mr. President, has struggled to come out with another edition since 2024 when the last edition expired unused.

The struggle by the ONSA is an indication that the questions of policy – what is national security in Nigeria, whose national security in Nigeria and what are national security issues in Nigeria – have not been raised and addressed by most Nigerians to give national security the legitimacy to underpin whatever strategy put in place to attaining national security.

The difference and thus the ease with which the two countries deal with national security is stark. The United States of America is the home and birthplace of National Security, National Security Council, National Security Strategy and National Security Adviser. The first two (national security and national security council) and therefrom the rest are underpinned by the legislation called the National Security Act of 1947.

Of these, the National Security Adviser (NSA) and the National Security Strategy (NSS) belong to any of the sitting president to tinker with as he/she deems fit. The NSA is thus described as the president's national security adviser and the NSS is described as the president's national security strategy. It is to underscore this personalised angle that President Trump named his national security strategy America First. Thus, the lifetime of the NSA and NSS tallied with the tenure of the sitting president.

Nigeria is not the birthplace of national security, security or both. Nigeria is not the home of national security, security and/or both. I used national security, security or both because this is the beginning of the confusion in the house of Nigeria's national security, security or both. In Nigeria, we are not certain which – national security, security or both – is tenable. This is arising from the content of the 1999 Constitution. The Constitution is the supposed legal instrument housing any item called national security, security or both.

Thus, there is a National Security, Security and/or both in operation in Nigeria. There is National Security Council, National Security Adviser and National Security Strategy. All of these are not underpinned by a legislation dedicated to a Nigeria idea of national security, security or both. However, the 1999 Constitution contains provisions on national security, security, adviser from whence national security adviser emanate. It is my considered circumstantial opinion that it is owing to the increasing international bilateral and multilateral engagements centred on the issues of national security, security or both that the need for national security strategy to present the Nigerian side emerged under the then National Security Adviser in 2014.

While the national security adviser lasts the duration of the sitting president, the national security strategy exceeds the term limit of the sitting president. Nigeria's national security strategy has a five-year lifespan. The Trump America First Strategy takes its cue from the National Security Act of 1947 and thus fulfill national security's visions in its missions. In the history of Nigeria's national security strategy which began in 2014, there is no relationship

between the content of the strategies and the realities of the conducts of the governments on the ground in the name of national security.

In Nigeria, the Strategies beginning in 2014 are not the products of most Nigerians natural evolutionary need for a doctrine called national security, security or both. I would go as far as arguing that the presidents whose tenure witnessed the making of strategies have no idea what they were and how they worked if they worked at all. The ONSA merely convinced them of the need for the strategies and they played along by endorsing the forewords writing on their behalf. Unlike the United States, the whole idea of national security for Nigeria was grounded on imitation and copying.

Colonel Sambo Dasuki would be in a better position to tell Nigerians the reason(s) that informed the making of the first national security strategy in 2014. Similarly, he will be in the position to tell Nigerians if the Strategy was used to drive programmes and/or whether the programmes pursued were in tandem with the Strategy. Colonel Sambo and his successors including AIG Nuhu Ribadu are in a better position to tell Nigeria if the National Security Strategies guided the conducts of governments on national security. Mr. Ribadu would be able to add the insight of functioning without a Strategy as he advised his principal following the expiration of the Buhari-Monguno era Strategy. They are also in the position to inform Nigerians whether the Strategies were stand-alone instrument meant to impress international partners and not to express most Nigerians and Nigeria's needs.

What would Nigeria learn, imitate or copy, should Nigeria choose to imitate, copy and not learn, from inside the America First Strategy of President Donald Trump?

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