

Security's Triangle of Politics and Failure in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic's preferred designation for the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) is security. The 1999 Constitution made this designation possible particularly when viewed from the associational and descriptive use of first national security and second security. However, other statutes governing the affairs of the military, intelligence and law enforcement thought differently. Conventionally, the term defence houses the affairs of the executive agencies comprising the military, intelligence and law enforcement.

In the growing use of this preferred designation, the tendency exists to use security and defence interchangeably as if the mean one and the same issue. In the confused condition of the use of these terms, national security and security have also been used interchangeably. There exist relationship and fundamental difference between the terms in climes where people have heads on their shoulders. In Nigeria, there is the challenge of making distinction without difference in the application of security and defence and national security and security. This, ideally, should not be so.

This is certainly the case if we take the issue of the conceptualisation of ideas seriously which include imbuing philosophy and legislation and/or borrowing ideas and building domestic worldviews into the ideas prior to its deployment for use. In most ideas whether generated locally and/or borrowed and this is the case security, we have failed the test of imbuing philosophy and legislation to these ideas. The failure is obviously damning in Nigeria's use of national security and security as if they mean one and the same issue. The struggle to make distinction without difference is glaringly and embarrassingly evident in the application of national security and security in daily usage.

In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, security's triangle of politics and failure describes the conditions that ensure that the strategic insecurity in security and defence continues to the benefit of the occupants of these offices and to the disadvantage of most Nigerians. The triangle comprised establishing the relationship and the difference between the president, national security adviser, minister of defence and, the chief of defence staff. Statutorily and traditionally, who comes after the president is in dispute amongst the two offices in relation to the last office.

In terms of hierarchies, only Mr. President's position is not in dispute. In what perking order does the national security adviser belong statutorily and traditionally? In what perking order does the minister of defence belong statutorily and traditionally in relation to the national security adviser? Where does the chief of defence staff stand vis-à-vis the national security adviser and the minister of defence? Who midwife the myriad of instructions that emanate from the president, national security adviser and the minister of defence to the chief of defence staff?

Perhaps, General Christopher Musa would be able to provide insight to this condition having been chief of defence staff and thus sandwich between the president, national security adviser and the minister of defence. Yet another insight could have come from General Owoye Andrew Azazi had he not been consumed in the intrigues that characterised the triangle of politics and failure associated with these offices. It is on record that General Azazi is the only Nigerian to have occupied the office of the chief of army staff, chief of defence staff and national security adviser under President Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

Perhaps the Nigerian varieties of the national security adviser and office of the national security adviser came out of the blues of bandwagoning trending cliché and nothing else. The concept of national security adviser and indeed the office of the national security adviser did not come out of the blues. Certainly not the type associated with the place of its origin in the United States of America. The constructs of national security council and national security adviser began with the creation and construction of the central idea called national security. They came with history and philosophy and they are tied to the sociologies of what is America, whose America, what are American issues and how can America be attained for Americans.

There was national sensitisation and referendum preceding the adoption of national security by Americans. National Security would retire and replace National Interest as the sum total and the constituents of Americans and America's worldview. Consequent on this unanimous resolution, Congress passed the legislation called the National Security Act in 1947. In the same year, the National Security Act was signed into law by President Harry S. Truman. Thus, was born into lexicon the idea called national security. There is a clear distinction in the application national security and defence in the affairs of the United States of America.

If Europe birthed security into the lexicon of the world in the 15th century and proceeded to operationalise its philosophy in its affairs, the United States did not adopt Europe's security. The United States birthed national security in 1947 to anchor its vision of self-vis-à-vis the world and to drive its missions for Americans all over the world.

What we have in Nigeria combined the two distinct philosophical premises of security and national security as contained in the 1999 Constitution. These combinations are without clear cut historical and philosophical underpinnings in their adoptions. Therein lies the organised confusion to which we have confined the use of security and defence in Nigeria particularly in the Fourth Republic.

In my characterisation of the political class, I identified the leadership elite of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) as the unspoken half of the political class. They complement the civil political elite in their resolve to get and keep power. Retired General Christopher Musa overcame the first phase of his political life as President Bola Tinubu's chief of defence staff. General Musa's performance or lack of performance in the office is the subject

of his principal's take and the take of most Nigerians evidence of which abound in the social media. In Nigeria's unorganised organised and arbitrary mode of appointing service chiefs, President Tinubu had his reasons for picking General Musa from amongst the many qualified candidates and making him his chief of defence staff. For Mr. President, the appointment was driven by 85 percent politics and 15 percent merits. General Musa fulfilled the politics that worked well for Mr. President when he chose him.

In less than two weeks of Mr. President sacking General Musa as his chief of defence staff, Mr. President, once again rode on the popularity of General Musa, aided by General Musa fitting into Mr. President's overwhelming political consideration, to appoint him as his new minister of defence. In both appointments, Mr. President was instrumental in making this possible. To this extent, General Musa owe Mr. President in making sure that his conduct does not affect Mr. President's politics. Mr. President is a first termmer and do have lots of politics left in Nigeria's political mines field.

Following General Musa's sacking as chief of defence staff, the idea of writing a monograph to capture the intrigues of his tenure occurred to me. I had tentatively titled the monograph "General Musa's Chief of Defence Staff-ship Caught between the Politics of Security and the Professionalism of Defence". What I present in this article encapsulate the idea of this monograph.

General Musa, in his tenure as chief of defence staff, once played the professional card even if fleetingly, in attempting to understand the politics first and primarily and policies second and secondarily of his political superiors. These superiors included Mr. President, National Security Adviser and the Minister of Defence. There were other superiors not least of all the Vice President. They all have their individual and collective politics to protect, defend and advance. These may have overridden his conducts as a professional soldier who was not oblivious of political interference and thus instrumental to his success and/or failure. The sacking of General Musa by Mr. President may have been borne out of the consideration of his conduct impeding the politics of one, two or the three of his principals individually and/or collectively.

General Musa's appointment as Mr. President's Minister of Defence introduced a fresh element quite different from his role as a professional soldier occupying a seemingly professional office. General Musa will have to contend with the politics of Mr. President first and foremost, the politics of the National Security Adviser which is second, the intervening forces between Mr. President and his National Security Adviser led by the Vice President and, General Musa's own politics, as he presides over the political side of what is the confused and contending portfolios of defence and security, in the Nigerian parlance. How General Musa conduct himself in this mined fields will make or mar him and most Nigerians whose goodwill he enjoyed tremendously.

The triangle of security has Mr. President at the top; the two edges of the triangle sit the National Security Adviser and the Minister of Defence either to the left or to the right and thus to the advantage of Mr. President; the National Security Adviser and the Minister of Defence sits on each of the two edges of the triangle. The Chief of Defence Staff is the rank outsider that reside outside the triangle. The Chief of Defence Staff is at the mercies of the machinations of these three occupants of the triangle in their scheming for their individual or collective security, defence and/or both however they understand this. General Musa is now inside as part of the solution or part of the problem.

Perhaps, since General Musa had once occupied this outsider position as the Chief of Defence Staff, in his current position as the Minister of Defence and a ranking insider, he would come with some lessons that would enable him to navigate the machinations inside Triangle and the aspect I described as the intervening forces led by the Vice President, in order to achieve some level of success for most Nigerians that overwhelmingly put their trust in him.

Whatever happens in security's triangle of politics and failure, the buck of whether General Musa succeeds or fail, stops on the table of Mr. President.

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