Inter-Security Agencies Conflict at Nigeria's Borders: a Challenge to Nigeria's National Security

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Abstract

This paper examines the patterns of inter-security agencies conflict at Nigeria's borders since independence. It is apparent that Nigeria's ill-defined borders will always bring tensions between Nigeria and her neighbouring countries. The paper argues that Nigeria's response to such conflict is very slow. Given the strategic, but also vulnerable, location of Nigeria in the African continent, especially at the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria's ineffective management of border issues can have adverse effects on Nigeria's national security. With specific cases of inter-security agencies conflict at Nigeria's borders, the loss of lives and properties, and the spill-over effect of these conflicts, the paper posits that a corrupt government and ill-disciplined policy must not expect anything reasonable from the security agencies. Given this situation, the decision-making machinery in Nigeria's national security and foreign policy issues should have a political will, unity of purpose and clear sense of direction on border issues being violated by Nigeria's neighbouring countries. To accomplish this, Nigeria should focus on collective defense and cooperative security in Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral relationships with her neighbouring countries.

Keywords: Border, Security agencies, Security, Conflict, National security, and Cooperative security

Introduction

Conflict is one of the central features of political life, this is because societies compete for scarce resources. In the same vein, conflict affects all human endeavour; from political, economic and religious, to social aspects of life.

Essentially, instability has been a common phenomenon in African continent especially from the beginning of the twentieth-century. Even though peace is relatively being restored to the continent after many years of violent conflicts as witnessed in Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Democratic Republic of Congo, to mention a few, the continent is far from having policies that promote people's security. Thus, the search for a common security concept at the regional level is a basic challenge to African government. It is often forgotten that the security sector role in the political stability of a state is highly dependent on the character of the state's social, cultural, economic, political structures, policies and practices put in place. As a matter of fact, security remains a problematic issue in the continent.

One of the main obstacles to sustainable peace and security in Africa is the exploitative and predatory relationship between security institutions of the state and the general population, in which the latter are more victims than beneficiaries of ill-motivated, ill-trained and ill-governed security institutions (Ebo, 2007:49).

Beyond the large scale conflict in Africa, including armed violence, inter-security agencies conflict has been a common recurrent issue. This has been so because of the inability of various countries to deal with wider security threats in the border. The likelihood that a nation's security agencies will come into conflict with some other nation's security agencies is possible, given the increase in number and strength of such nations' transnational interests and commitments.

Indeed, the geo-strategic location of Nigeria in the continent, and the ethno-cultural linkages of Nigeria's border communities of neighbouring countries not only allow transnational trade, but also allow free flow of aliens. Even more pertinent is Nigeria's porous border which allows illegal drugs, encourages human trafficking, arms and ammunition and illegal bunkering.

These are asymmetric threats that Nigeria face on her borders. However, an effort to curtail these illegal acts can breed discontent between Nigeria security agents, and the security agents from the neighbouring countries

Against this background, the main focus of this paper is to analyse inter-security agencies conflict at Nigeria's borders, and its challenges to Nigeria's national security. Although, Nigeria has not had any invasion from outside or serious border war with any of her neighbouring countries, but inter-security agencies conflict is a common feature. In terms of frequency, it cannot be said that such clashes are common occurrences but they nevertheless constitute very serious grounds for concern given the strategic, but also vulnerable, location of Nigeria in the continent. This is important because Nigeria is surrounded in the North, East and West by French-speaking countries of Niger, Chad, Cameroun and Benin. As much as the French speaking countries would want to be on friendly terms with their Nigerian counterparts, (trade, illegal aliens, trafficking etc) an unsettled border dispute will however remain a source of conflict between the security agents. This however has serious implications for Nigeria's national security.

Conceptual Discourse

The following concepts are defined in order to understand the main thrust of this paper. These are conflict, security, security agencies and national security.

Conflict

Conflict is defined as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. However, Coser sees conflict as a "struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals" (Williams, 2004: 6).

In the same vein, conflict is a condition in which one identifiable group of human being (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio-economic, political, or others) is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1996: 187). This implies that conflict cannot be excluded from social life.

Deutsch noted that any comprehensive approach to understanding conflict will necessarily include consideration of both objective and subjective factors. That is, while competition for scarce resource serves to explain most conflicts, other non-objective factors, such as psychological needs, values, and issues of perception, systemic factors, the link between formal and informal relationship, or the nature of changes taking place within the political system are equally important (Deutsch, 1991: 28).

The core area of this paper is conflict at international level. These are contests or clashes between or across nation-states. Thus, conflict may ensue where the nationals of one state are attacked, killed or maimed by the agents of another state. More often than not these types of conflicts are presented as occurring between governments and it is usually over territory or economic resource.

Security

The term security is about the condition of safety, or feeling safe from danger. It has to do with the defence, protection and preservation of core values, and the absence of threats to acquired values (Bakut, 2006: 235). Similarly, security is defined as the defence, policing and intelligence functions of states, and the management of threats to and breaches of the peace through multilateral and bilateral processes (Eze and Hettman, 2005).

Although, security is more attached to the military, some scholars caution its meaning in this direction. For Sola Ogunsanwo:

Security is more than military security or security from external attacks. For many of the four billion inhabitants in the developing countries, security is conceived as the basic level of the struggle for survival. Therefore, in order to provide an integrated African security assessment, the non-military dimensions of security should be added. Henceforth, African security as a concept should be applied in its broadest sense to include economic security, social security, environmental security, food security, the equality of life security, and technological security (quoted in Nwolise, 2006: 349-350.

As such security is linked to development. To the extent that scholars are now talking about the *securitization of development,* in the sense that insecurities and underdevelopment create the conditions for wars and armed conflicts. As McNamara rightly warned:

Any society that seeks to achieve military security against the background of acute food shortage, population explosion, low level of production and per capita income, low technological development, inadequate and inefficient public utilities, and chronic problem of unemployment, has a false sense of security (cited in Nwolise, 2006: 350).

Therefore, security must be appreciated from both military and non-military dimensions.

National security is construed in terms of the sum total of a country's effort to promote, preserve and maintain itself, its core values, contain instability, enhance development, thereby boosting the welfare, well-being and quality of life of the citizens by enhancing consumption patterns (Isa, 2007: 20).

On the other hand, Nwolise argues that the sources of national insecurity can be seen from two angles. The first angle is the internal sources which include: political domination or inequality, socio-economic injustices, human rights abuses, resource mismanagement, poor leadership, military coups, extreme deprivation and marginalisation, civil wars, revolution, terrorism, secession, ethnic and religious riots, food riots and others, all hinging on bad government, manipulation of ethnic and religious differences, et cetera. The second angle is the external sources which include: military invasion, cross-national raids, subversive infiltration, sabotage, smuggling, espionage, terrorism, and cross-border criminality among a host of others (Nwolise, 2006: 350). To this end, national security connotes deliberate measures to identify and ward off perceived, potential and real threats to the nation-state (Jonah, 2008).

Security Agencies

Security agencies include coercive and non-coercive instruments of managements; for both internal and external security. In Nigeria, coercive instruments include elements of the Armed Forces – the Army, the Navy and the Airforce, Military Intelligence, the Police and the State Security Services, while non-coercive agencies include the Custom Services, Immigration, Port Authority Officers etc.

Inter-Security Agencies Conflict at Nigeria's Borders

Security is very vital for economic development. However, the porous nature of Nigeria's border not only encourages crime and other social vices, but also retarded Nigeria's socio-economic development.

In order to secure her borders, Nigeria's security agents have been involved in this great task. At the same time, the neighbouring countries surrounding Nigeria have also implored their security agents to secure their borders. Therefore, the involvement of security agents in the management of border of every nation is inevitable. Admittedly, illegal immigrants, illicit trades, boundary adjustment, political refugees, social unrest, border patrol and oil bunkering are some of the issues that can lead to inter- security agencies conflict.

The first manifestation of inter- security agencies conflict at Nigeria's borders is the problem of boundary adjustment. It is important to note that African borders have been designed by the Europeans (i.e. the colonizers who used sometimes arbitrary lines based on latitude and longitude to map out Africa. As a matter of fact, the Africa borders do not reflect historically grown territorial divisions; neither do they take into account ethnic divisions. For Nigeria, her geographical area overlaps between four neighbouring countries, whose populations are linked by socio-economic and cultural bonds. It was not surprising therefore that the border problem with Cameroun and Nigeria is a colonial legacy. To be sure, violations of Nigeria's border by Camerounians who make incursions into Nigerian villages (especially in the Peninsula area) as well as regular harassment of Nigerians living in the border area date back to the 1960s. However, tension at the border area escalated in 1981. To the extent that Nigerians living along the creeks were frequently subjected to humiliating treatment, such as being forced to pay tax to Cameroun, forced to discard trading in naira, confiscation of their goods and property including fish catches and at times, detention (Imobighe, 2003: 37). The climax was the killing of five Nigerian soldiers who were on routine patrol along the common border in May 1981 (Imobighe, 2003: 37). Although, the Nigerian soldiers did not retaliated, but since then conflict over Bakassi Peninsula has been a recurrent decimal. In addition, the Camerounian gendarmes allegedly occupied sixteen border villages in May 1987 in Borno state. It was however repulsed by Nigerian army units. In October 1989, Camerounian gendarmes allegedly abducted four Nigerian customs officials on routine border patrol duties (http://www.country-data.com). However, the recent handing over of Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroun has reduced the tension in that region.

Similarly, the Nigeria-Chad conflict is another issue. Partly because the Lake Chad was named after Chad Republic, most Chadians tend to consider the entire lake as their territory. In fact, the prospect of striking huge oil ponds within the lake which is held by oil explorers has further enhanced the economic attraction of the Lake; so much so that Chadians are eager to take possession of as much of the islands as possible. However, between April 18 and 24 of 1983, Nigerian and Chadian troops were engaged in a fierce confrontation at Kofiya, Sabowa, Changwale and Kinsara islands on Lake Chad well within Nigeria's territory (Daily Times, 1983:1).

In another instance, illegal immigrants and smugglers from Niger Republic, with which Nigeria shared a 1,497 kilometre border, posed perennial problems. As a matter of fact, Nigeria recalled all its existing currency notes in exchange for new notes in 1984. This step was designed to preempt the return of the old currency, much of which had been smuggled out of the country by politicians, and to establish a new baseline for Nigeria's financial system that could more readily be monitored. To prevent the reentry of the smuggled currency, Nigeria closed all its borders. Although gasoline and meat, on which landlocked Niger depended, were exempted, Niamey lost nearly one-fourth of its 1984 custom revenue (http://www.country-data.com). Nigeria also resorted to mass deportation of Nigeriens. However, a clash occurred near the Borno state border in May 1989, when Nigerian soldiers and immigration officials investigated reported crop damage by a cattle herd from Niger (http://www.country-data.com).

Essentially, the minor incursions by Beninoise troops and an increased in smuggling to Nigeria has been a constant problem for Nigeria. Although, the Nigeria-Benin Joint Border Commission was reactivated in 1981 to control smuggling, illegal aliens, and harassment of people, the constant suspicion between the two countries' security agents did not only jeopardize their action, but also create tensions.

In fact, the destitute states of most illegal immigrants breeds a ground for crime and criminal pursuits, especially as such immigrants without roots and fixed abodes will complicate the task of criminal investigation and prosecution and thus will appeal especially to crime barons. The consequence of this is that lack of cooperation from the security agents from Benin to supply adequate informations about these barons did not only bring antagonism from Nigeria's security agents, but can also lead to conflict. This is a common issue that is applied to all border areas of Nigeria.

In the same vein, the language barrier leads to conflict along the major border of Nigeria. The situation is so pathetic that most of the security agents speak only their native language; or some speaking English (as in Nigeria) and speaking French (as in Cameroun, Benin, Niger and Chad). This communication gap often leads to inter-security agencies conflict at the borders.

Perhaps the current inter-security agencies conflict at Nigeria's borders has to do with maritime border disputes. Nigeria being a maritime state and a leading member of the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GOG) comprising Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroun, Sao Tome and Principe, and Benin Republic, has a mandate to protect her sea border. This is because the Gulf of Guinea (GOG) is rich in natural resources and is currently facing a wide range of maritime threats and vulnerabilities. The Navy, Marine Police, Customs, and Immigration all share intelligence in curbing sea-based illegal activities (pouching, smuggling, piracy, illegal bunkering, drug trafficking etc).

More importantly, unending disagreements over maritime boundaries could lead to inter-security agencies conflict. Fortunately, the current geo-political environment in our maritime area of interest is such that conflict resolution has worked between Nigeria and her maritime neighbours (Jonah, 2008:27). However, various security agencies from the GOG handling sea-based activities often work at cross-purposes or get engaged in turf wars. Therefore, this conflict between these security agents further exposes the GOG to criminal activities.

Inter-Security Agencies Conflict at Nigeria's Borders and Challenges to Nigeria's National Security

The state has responsibility for maintaining its authority and preserving law and order within its own border. Thus, a country cannot be secured when its border is porous. However, the porous nature of Nigeria's borders presents evidence of the impact of cross-border Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). This is facilitated by huge cross-border smuggling and mercenary activities (from Chad and Niger) and the country' long porous borders that are poorly policed due to inadequate resources and the lack of capacity of the security agencies (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:6).

Some of the consequences of this ugly situation include threat to the peace and security of Nigeria, threat to Nigeria's territorial integrity especially from the eastern and northern borders, loss of lives and properties of Nigerian citizens residing in the border areas and constant harassment of Nigerians in these border areas.

The biggest challenge to Nigeria's national security within the context of inter-security agencies conflict at her borders is that Nigeria lacks the capabilities that are useful in conflict intervention. In fact, there is a challenge in terms of personnel and materials in this regard.

Similarly, Nigeria's economy remains fragile, underdeveloped, heavily dependent on oil, mismanagement of resources, unsuitable development plans and lack of welfare programme. Indeed, the economy is very important in equipping and maintaining the security agents in the pursuit of their assignments outside Nigeria's borders.

The ineffective demarcation of Nigeria's border has been a big challenge to her national security. While the Western and Northern borders are fairly well demarcated and perhaps need only minor adjustments and up-dating, some parts of the eastern and north-eastern borders with Cameroun and Chad respectively have not been effectively demarcated and have remained bones of contention between Nigeria and the two neighbouring countries (Imobighe, 2003: 35). Even along the north-western and north-eastern sector where the borders have been relatively stable, the geographic condition, which is more or less a desert condition, makes the border porous and hence represent areas of potential conflict and security violations. Thus, the spill-over effect of this conflict is an overflow of refugees from the neighbouring countries to Nigeria. Even more serious is the influx of illegal aliens who are normally engaged in criminal activities along the borderline areas of Nigeria.

Similarly, the constant security skirmishes between Nigeria and its neighbouring countries can have unintended consequences between Nigeria and France. To be sure, France was Nigeria's only perceived continental threat. France maintained defence pacts with several African states; stationed troops permanently in Chad, Gabon and Central African Republic and intervene in their local politics. In short, France's hegemonic interests and regional penetration constrained Nigeria politically and strategically, frustrating its "natural" emergence as the preeminent regional power (http://www.country-data.com).

On the other hand, the coasts are vulnerable and the marine sector deserves urgent national attention. This is because a large percentage of Nigeria's commerce is moved by sea. Nigeria, like other littoral states of Africa, has to contend with increasingly disturbing maritime challenges to her national security. The contemporary maritime challenges within Nigeria's maritime area of interest result from the dynamics of economics, socio-political, environmental, technological and security factors (Jonah, 2008:23). Even more pertinent is the increasing sophistication of organized piracy, oil-bunkering and hostage-taking in the oil-producing Niger-Delta region, coupled with the region's peculiar swampy geography and extensive access to international waterways, combine to make the region an important conduit for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) availability and proliferation in Nigeria (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005: 6).

Unfortunately, Nigeria has not seized the opportunity to exploit technology (ships, weapons and aircraft) to be more effective and better prepared to protect our national interests at sea. To this end, SALW proliferation in our maritime area of interest has become a great threat to our national security.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that Nigeria's ill-defined borders will always bring tensions between Nigeria and her neighbouring countries. It is therefore, the responsibility of Nigeria to protect her territory. Such responsibility fell in the hands of Nigeria's security agencies. Apart from Cameroun, Nigeria has not had any invasion from outside or border war with any of her neighbours since independence, but inter-security agencies conflict is a common phenomenon. It has been established that Nigeria's responses to such conflict is very slow. Given the strategic location of Nigeria in the continent, especially at the GOG, Nigeria's ineffective management of border issues can have adverse effects on Nigeria's national security. In fact, a corrupt and ill-disciplined policy must not expect anything reasonable from the security agencies.

In this context, the decision-making machinery in national security and foreign policy issues should have a political will, unity of purpose and clear sense of direction on border issues being violated by Nigeria's neighbouring countries. More importantly, the security agents at Nigeria's borders should be briefed about their role in maintaining peace at the border or their area of operation. This will lessen suspicion and tension from other security agents from the neighbouring countries.

In order to accomplish this, there is the need to make efforts at focusing on collective defense and cooperative security in Nigeria's bilateral and multilateral relationships with her neighbouring countries.

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