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BORDER SECURITY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF NIGERIA'S RELATIONS WITH HER NEIGHBOURS

Abstract

Colonialism and arbitrary boundary creation makes the issue of border security a grave concern for the African countries. However, promotion of bilateral and multilateral relations in diverse areas has provided the impetus for managing border tensions. Several considerations ranging from shared cultural and historical affinities to lessons from the 1967-1970 Civil War has influenced Nigeria's 'big brother' image vis-a-vis its neighbours. The role of 'big brother' arises from Nigeria's perception of low intensity threat from its weak and unstable neighbours. The paper identifies the reasons that lead to border tensions in Nigeria and analyses the rationale of Nigeria's 'big brother' type role vis-a-vis its neighbours in the West African sub-region.

Introduction

Border security occupies a central place in any nation's defence policy. It is a strategic imperative to know what to defend, the rationale for defence and how to defend the territorial sovereignty and independence at minimum strain, stress and cost

possible.¹ In its expanse, border security includes both active and passive measures adopted in defence of a nation's core interests and values on land, at sea and in the air/space.

Border security is a universal concern in strategic studies. It is much more of a grave concern in Africa due to colonialism and arbitrary boundary creation with utter disregard to the degree of cultural affinities. More so, at political independence, a number of colonial powers left unresolved border disputes. This is one main cause of the high frequency of border insecurity in Africa, as well as inter-state tensions and conflicts. As Africa increasingly appreciates that scarce resources for wars are wasteful, the states are thinking more of how to manage border tensions for the promotion of bilateral and multilateral relations in diverse areas of technical cooperation.

The Specific Focus

The present effort places Nigeria and its neighbours in focus. Like other African sub-regions, West Africa is afflicted by border disputes, border tensions and insecurity. Nigeria has an extensive land and coastal border stretching to about 4,650km. It has to defend a landmass of about 923, 765 sq. km². In a bid to guarantee border security and West African Security Community (WASC), Nigeria is committed to strengthening both international and external security enforcement apparatus.

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- 1 Aja Akpuru-Aja, *Policy and Strategic Studies, Uncharted Waters of War and Peace in International Relations* Abakaliki, Nigeria, Willy Rose & Applesed, 1999, pp. 174-175.
 - 2 T. A. Imobighe, "Public Order and Border Security" in *NIGERIA – A People United, A Future Assured*, Volume 1, Abuja – Calabar, Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. p. 455.

Nigeria's Border Relations with its Neighbours

Nigeria shares uneasy friendship with neighbours due to border insecurity. In the West, Nigeria shares border with the Republic of Benin. In the Eastern border of Nigeria is Cameroun. The Republics of Niger and Chad share border with Nigeria in the North. Nigeria's border relations extend to its South-East neighbours such as Equatorial Guinea and, indeed, Sao Tome and Principe. Nigeria perceived its neighbours as of strategic significance to the country's international and external security. Certain considerations influence the big brother image of Nigerian with its neighbours³.

The first confidence building issue relates to the shared cultural and historical affinities⁴. The second has to do with Nigeria's avowed determination to play "big brother role" game in African affairs, taking root from the West African sub-region⁵. The third identifies with the need for a West African Security community to condition the goals of Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS)⁶. Finally, the Nigerian civil war in 1967-1970 left a strategic lesson for Nigeria that good neighbours constitute additional defence and security for a country. For Nigeria, that shares borders with weak and unstable francophone countries, constructive rather than militant approach is settled for in the management of its border issues and relations⁷.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.* p. 456

5 Femi George, "The African Union, ECOWAS and the Management of Nigeria's Relations With Her Neighbours", Abuja – Nigeria, Director of Africa Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs", Paper presented in the Presidential Advisory Council on International Relations, Lagos, January 15, 2002, pp. 20-27.

6 Aja Akpuru-Aja, *Op.Cit.*, p.1974.

7 M. A. Vogt, "Nigeria's Defence Policy: A framework of Analysis" in Olusanya and Akindele (eds.), *Nigeria's External Relations, The first 25 Years*, Lagos, NIIA, 1986.

To the extent that Nigeria is more committed to good neighbourliness, the successive leadership of the country has not confronted seriously the border issues. This explains the occasional hiccups in Nigeria's relations with its neighbours. Quite often, Nigeria is drawn near war situations by Republics of Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroun. Border communities of Nigeria, and border traders have often been under threats from their neighbours. Smuggling of goods and influx of illegal arms and ammunitions across shared borders adversely affect the economy, social security and internal security of Nigeria. The absence of refugee policy compounds the violations of Nigeria border by its crisis-ridden neighbours.

As part of strengthening national defence and security, Nigeria adopts intervention role in inter-state tensions in the sub-region. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Nigeria staked its resources, glory and prestige to restore normal relations between Chad and Niger. In the same period, Nigeria led the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Peacekeeping Mission to restore order and stability between Chad and Libya over the rich Uranium Aouzou strip⁸. In the early 1990s, Nigeria led the allied forces of ECOWAS to restore order and peace in the Liberian and Sierra Leonian crises. The most tension-packed remains the issue between Cameroun over the control of the oil-and fish-rich Bakassi Peninsula. Occasional border skirmishes have cost the two countries lives and resources and threatened diplomatic relations. In spite of provocations and counter provocations, Nigeria has had the credit of constructive engagement by means of diplomatic and legal procedures.

8 Aja Akpuru-Aja, "Chadian-Libyan Cooperative Option to End Hostilities: Implications for Nigeria's Libyaphobia", Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi, *Foreign Affairs Report*, Vol. XLI. No. 586, May-June 1992.

Nigeria's diplomatic strategy is no cowardice. It promotes peace initiative when war is avoidable. It has helped to arrest conflicts within states; and between states against spillover effects on Nigeria, particularly the management of the high influx of refugees to contain the prevailing social insecurity in Nigeria.

The Architecture of Border Security Threats

Since border security is strategically a central condition for survival of a country, power conscious states do not sleep over the violation of borders⁹. Perhaps, a useful appraisal of how Nigeria manages its relations with its neighbours should have, at the background, pictures along the shared borders. This is also a measurement of the sources and forms of tensions and/or security threats.

Border Porosity

Though an extensive landmass has its unique challenges, Nigeria and its neighbours are seriously threatened by the numerous cases of porous borders. The Northern land borders are too vulnerable and easy to violate at any point. In contrast, the coastal borders in the East and South present greater difficulties of violations. This is not specifically due to the effectiveness of the immigration officers, Navy and Airforce more than the geo-theatre of the environment¹⁰. The coastal areas have difficult terrains with creeks, swampy and mangrove settings. Thus far, the Nigeria Navy exercises more control of illegal movement of persons, goods, and services across coastal borders. The Nigeria Navy often battles

9 T. A. Imobighe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 456.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 456-457.

smugglers, pirates and undesirable elements!! In the North, Nigeria has no adequate and functional border security agencies¹¹.

Psycho-Cultural Threats

The arbitrary boundary divisions by the European colonialists foisted uneasy ethno-cultural relations across borders. For example, the major ethnic groups in Nigeria – Hausa/Fulani, Kanuri, Yoruba and Ejaḡham – are among the list of bi-nationally partitioned culture areas¹². These ethnic groups – Hausa/Fulani and Kanuri – are found in Nigeria, Chad, and Niger Republic. Yoruba are found in Nigeria and Republic of Benin. Incidentally, these ethnic groups also share the same Islamic faith, which is integrative. There are frequent movements across the international borders of Nigeria. The bulk of such transnational border movements are more unofficial than official.

Arising from the shared psycho-cultural affinities between ethno-religious groups, the disposition of Nigeria is one of tolerance and accommodation of incidental nuisances. Though this accommodation carries elements of social insecurity, it has tended more to promote integrative activities of the border communities with identical festivals and religious activities. Nigeria, or even the affected neighbouring states, cannot easily disregard these cultural and religious—bound activities. Furthermore, these border communities share common economic activities, such as farming, fishing and hunting. Opportunities are used more informally to foster good relations between Nigeria and its neighbours. Implicit in this good relations syndrome are the excesses of interference in purely

11 *Ibid.* see also Femi George, *Op. Cit.*, p. 26.

12 T. A. Imobighe, *Op. Cit.*, p. 456.

Nigerian local issues. Occasionally security reports implicate Nigerian border communities as hiding under the guise of shared cultural and religious values to fuel religious and political crises in Nigeria. The Maitaisine Peasant Riot in the early 1980s; and the religious riots in Kaduna, Kano and Jos in the 1990s, 2001 and 2002 have had the foot and finger-prints of religious fanatics outside the local borders of Nigeria.

Lack of clear border demarcation has created a variant of psycho-cultural behaviours and relations, which undermine defence and security duties. The carefree attitudes of Nigeria and its neighbours have occasionally exploded into incursions, extortion of taxes and levies, clashes between border communities particularly farmers, fishermen and traders. Occasionally, cross border clashes take place between security operatives. This frequently occurs at the marine border with Chad and Cameroun.

The Other Subversive Threats

As previously observed, too many security threats arise from the nature of border relations between Nigeria and its neighbours. Each is potentially subversive¹³. These include smuggling, piracy, alien influx, insurgency, military incursions, commando air-raid, and subtle penetration and intervention. The table below summarizes the nature, manifestation and high risk areas.

13 Femi Geroge, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

POSSIBLE BORDER SECURITY VIOLATIONS/THREATS

Table: T. B. Imobighe, "Public Order and Border Security" in *Nigeria – A People United, A Future Assured*, Volume 1, Abuja – Calabar, Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd. p. 457.

| Nature | Manifestation | High Risk Area |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Smuggling | <i>Constant</i> | <i>Virtually all Borders</i> |
| Piracy | Fairly constant | Coastal border |
| Alien Influx | Constant | Land borders |
| Insurgency | Constant | Niger Delta Region |
| Military Incursion | Not very constant | Borders with Benin, Chad & Cameroun |
| Commando Raid/Air Bombardment | Likely | Coastal oil fields & other strategic installations |
| Full-Scale invasion | Not likely | Not determinable apriori |
| Subversive Penetration | Most likely | The entire borders |

Relations with Cameroun and Chad

Generally, Nigeria has good relations with Cameroun. The source of stress remains the Bakassi Peninsula. arising from the mono-cultural economy of Nigeria and Cameroun, the discovery of oil in the Peninsula aroused a grave border dispute. Beside the general subversive activities across the shared porous borders, the Bakassi Peninsula is perceived by the two countries as a **time bomb**. However, Nigeria has adopted peace promotion management techniques to avert war or escalated conflict situation. Initially, Nigeria did not send military troops to the disputed peninsula. Nigeria was satisfied with the presence of Custom and Excise, and Immigration officers¹⁴. It was not until the 1980s that border clashes

14 See Ugochukwu O, "ICJ Ruling and the Doctrine of Lachae's Acquiescence" in *Daily Champion*, Nigeria, 2002 ed. November 11, p. 20.

compelled Nigeria to dispatch military troops not for war but to achieve the value of deterrence. Nigeria maintains that only dialogue is the supreme strategy for resolving the border dispute. The Nigerian disposition influenced the Government of Cameroun in exercising restraint in effecting border incursions, swaggering, and military insurgency.

The height of Nigeria's avowed diplomatic strategy in the management of its relations with Cameroun became clearer in the wake of mutual acceptance of the two countries for an arbitration by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). On October 10, 2002, the ICJ ruling gave advantage of judgement to Cameroun. It was perceived as disastrous by Nigerian government and its people¹⁵. In spite of every pressure to adopt a coercive, militant posture, Nigeria and Cameroun remain open to achieve incidental remedies. The intervention of the United Nation's Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, encouraged Nigeria and Cameroun to toe the line of Joint Border Commission to promote continuity in collaboration rather than discord. In this way, Nigeria and Cameroun are still hopeful in sustaining constructive engagement as good neighbours¹⁶.

Nigeria's relations with Chad is less fear—inspiring than with Cameroun¹⁷. There is no remarkable boundary dispute except marine border clashes at the Lake Chad region. It has been the determination of Nigeria to have a peaceful neighbour in Chad. In the same period, Nigeria led the OAU peacekeeping mission to resolve the Chadian-Lybian hostilities over the control of the rich uranium Aouzou strip.

15 Femi George, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.

16 *Ibid*, p. 23.

17 *Ibid*, pp. 23-24.

Against frequent provocations of border violations by the Chadian refugees, crime actors, armed gangs and religious fanatics, Nigeria has continued to exercise utmost restraint in the use of extreme force posture. The high incidence of the Chadian border violations compelled Nigeria to increase military presence in the shared border risk areas. Yet, Nigeria insists on respecting common economic, cultural and religious affinities.

Relations with Republics of Benin and Niger

Nigeria and Republic of Benin have cordial and warm relations. Though border differences abound, Nigeria has rested on the rich lessons drawn from massive support of Republic of Benin during the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970. The rebel Biafran forces were refused any cooperation by Republic of Benin, including military bases and international relief materials from the Red Cross Society.

With regular exchange of ministerial visits, Nigeria and Republic of Benin have been able to promote common cultural, social, economic and technical areas of cooperation¹⁸. The Nigeria-Benin Joint Commission is a transnational mechanism for confidence and capacity building, particularly in dousing the irritations of artificial boundary tensions, illegal influx of aliens, and occasional clashes between border communities. In all, Nigeria and Republic of Benin are in high spirit to use dialogue always is settling perceived or real sources of stress. The two countries are forward looking in such joint ventures as the onigbolo cement factory, and the Save Sugar Company in Benin Republic Furthermore, Nigeria and Benin Republic have allowed their common membership of ECOWAS and

18 Ukpab, "Perception of Threat and Defence Priorities for Nigeria's Frontiers" in T. A. Imobighe, *Op. Cit.*, pp 115-116.

the quadripartite commission to sustain good relations. The later comprises Nigeria, Togo, Ghana and Benin.

Nigeria's relations with Niger Republic are not remarkably different from those of Republic of Benin and Chad. To demonstrate the importance Nigeria attaches to its relations with Niger Republic, Government set up Boundary Commission headed by the Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.

Meanwhile, Nigeria and Republic of Niger are engaged with rehabilitation and reconstruction of pillars and beacons along transnational boundaries. This is in view of meeting international standards. This has added to a Nigeria – Niger Joint Commission in Niamey Nigeria that is handling every sphere of relations between the two countries in joint ventures, power supplies, culture and religion.

Consolidating Good Neighbourliness

Border security issue in Nigeria occupies a central place in Nigeria's defence priorities¹⁹. As strategic as good neighbourliness is, Nigeria's defence priority anchors on building up defence and security measures capable of helping border communities cope with fears and anxieties of losing life, liberty and property. The other is maintaining a joint combat ready military command and control structure – infantry, Airforce and Navy – capable of conveying to the immediate neighbours clear signals that Nigeria has limit to what it could compromise in safeguarding its territorial sovereignty and independence from external threats or aggressions. Defence priorities for the frontiers of Nigeria broadly involves knowing clearly what the deficiencies are like, the degree of threat, what actually to

19 Aja Akpuru-Aja, "Policy & Strategic Studies," *Op.Cit.*, pp. 174-175.

defend, and appropriate strategies and tactics to achieve border security at minimum risk with Nigerian neighbours.

A policy of good neighbourliness invites confidence-building measures at government-to-government level on the one hand, and between border communities on the other hand. Nigeria must take steps to assure its weak neighbours of the central value of dialogue in resolving border disputes rather than think and act war. So, there is a need to activate existing efforts at clearly settling border relations by the use of a standard formula. The Nigeria Boundary Commission, which was inaugurated in 1988, will be useful in this respect. Nigeria-Guinea Gulf Commission initiative is also assuring.

Defence Ministries of Nigeria and its neighbours have a role to play. They should be able to develop a network or forum for presenting, debating and resolving border issues to avoid escalation of violence. Joint border patrols could be worked out such as the Nigeria-Benin Joint Anti-Crime Patrol at the border town of Seme. Border patrol Defence should be target specific by mapping out strategic priority areas such as clusters of population (towns), communication centres, coastal areas, creeks, oil and military installations²⁰. Border Patrol Defence (BPD) will be more effective if border communities are encouraged to work closely with immigration officers to spotlight those vulnerable areas—hills, mountains, creeks and other geographical routes--which the enemies would readily exploit to subvert the policy of good neighbourliness. To operate from a position of greater strength, the services of environmental scientists will help in the mapping out of mountainous and low lying areas, mangrove swamps, riverine areas, creeks; tropical forests, grassland and semi-desert vegetation.

Given the high frequency of border violations by Nigerian neighbours, Nigeria should no longer be contended with stationing immigration, customs and excise officers at border posts but a credible deployment of military troops to achieve deterrence objectives, where applicable. It will also be a source of confidence building for Nigerian border communities. The imperatives include well functioning ----

a) Air-border Patrol Aircraft, b) Air-to-Ground Base Communications and c) Customs Border services patrol vehicles and customs communications infrastructure.

Integrated intelligence community is vital for Nigeria to control intelligence and information services within the West African sub-region. This involves training Nigerian Security operatives in English-French capacity building; geo-strategic location, location behaviour, threat and threat analysis and feedback functions. Aside English and French language proficiency, external intelligence operatives should learn border community languages or dialectics in Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Kanuri and Ashante, which are mostly spoken in the sub-region.

Border Community Based Homeland Security (BCHS) should be encouraged by Nigeria and its neighbours. This derives from the strong bond of cultural, religious and socio-psychological affinities between the border communities. They should be encouraged to live in peace and security for they have shared values, which the arbitrary imposition of boundaries should not invalidate or endanger. BCHS will serve as an instrument for controlling transborder criminals; settling matters arising from incidental border violations of any sort. National governments should support BCHS in the West African sub-region.

Increased bilateral and multilateral relations remain open assets for promoting good neighbourliness. ECOWAS is not just an economic venture divorced from security. The enabling environment of ECOWAS to succeed lies in the creation and maintenance of West African Security Community. ECOWAS should reactivate its mechanism to harmonise border relations to avoid diverting resources meant for development into waging wars between states.

Conclusion

Efforts have been made in the paper to bring into focus the specifics of Nigeria's border security issues and management with its neighbours in the West African sub-region. The common causes of border tensions arise from colonially imposed boundaries, insurgency activities enabled by shared religious and cultural affinities, extensive landmass and porous borders; ineffective border patrol formula, and lack of confidence building measures between governments and for border communities. The discovery of crude oil and solid mineral resources in shared borders is a variant of border insecurity.

Border provocation's apart, Nigeria has consistently maintained a policy of constructive engagement, which places high premium on the strategic value of dialogue than the use of force. Nigeria plays a big brother role in the West African sub-region because its perception of threat from its weak and unstable neighbours is of low intensity. More so, Nigeria has learned a strategic lesson during its 1967-1970 civil war that national defence is not always a function of local milieu but good neighbourliness. It is hoped that neighbours of Nigeria should act the same.