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Power and Politics in Nigeria: An Expositions of the Hobbesian State of Nature

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Abstract

In the light of recent security developments in various regions of Nigeria, it is safe to assert that Nigeria is faced with a myriad of multi-dimensional security challenges, which pose threats to the country's national security. The insecurity situation in the country has led many to wonder if Nigeria has not returned to the Hobbesian state of nature where, life was solitary, nasty, brutish and short. This paper is an attempt to look critically to the insecurity problem in Northern Nigeria. This paper finds out that these security challenges are complex in nature and continually impact all the country's socio-economic development; national security, public safety and criminal justice space has also been impacted. The paper concludes that the growing rate of Nigeria's poverty profile shows that Nigerians have been living in a state of insecurity. That a man who is not guaranteed of his welfare cannot feel secured. The study relied on secondary source of data generated from documentary sources such as journals, official publications, books chapters, newspapers and magazines as well online materials and through the lens of Thomas Hobbes Social Contract theory. This paper recommends strengthen governance and improve security measures.

Keyword: Development, Insecurity, Insurgency, National Security, Social Contract

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INTRODUCTION

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically states that "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". That a man who is not guaranteed of his welfare cannot feel secured). The UNDP Report, also stated that "human security is no longer concern with weapons, it is now concerned with human life and dignity". The UNDP defines human security with two terms: 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want. The freedom from fear includes personal, community, and political security, which are usually associated with violence or threats. The freedom from want is related to the establishment of sustainable human development to achieve human security; which includes economic, food, health, and environmental security. The biggest threat to humans is no longer from war, but is related to daily life, and includes job scarcity, economic disparity, underdevelopment, famine, pandemic, disease, and environmental degradation (UNDP, 1994).

Security is a critical value to every living creature. It is the most important value that determines all other values. In the light of recent security developments in various regions of Nigeria, it is safe to assert that Nigeria is faced with a myriad of multi-dimensional security challenges, which pose threats to the country's national security. These security challenges are complex in nature and continually impact all the country's socio-economic development. Consequently, national security, public safety and criminal justice space has also been impacted by these security challenges (FES,2021) in (Abwage & Bako, 2024). There is no doubt that Nigeria in recent times have witnessed an unprecedented level of insecurity spanning from kidnapping, insurgency, Fulani Herdsmen, and most recently hunger and massive inflation.

The growing rate of Nigeria's poverty profile shows that Nigerians have been living in a state of insecurity. The rate of criminal activities in Nigeria is on the rise (Rufus & Eyo,2017) . The insecurity situation in the country has led many to wonder if Nigeria has not returned to the state of nature where, according to Thomas Hobbes, life was solitary, nasty, brutish and short. The country is facing its greatest challenge ever since the fierce civil war that almost threw her into extinction. The country has had to contain the Boko-Haram menace and Fulani herdsmen in the North, the IPOB agitation in the East and the Niger Delta Avengers in the South all these amidst a nasty recession that has made her people poorer.

Armed bandits' attacks on the education sector have further worsened Nigeria's current 10.5 million out of 5 school children. In addition to abductions, bandits in the Northern regions engage in other criminal activities which include; village raids, sexual harassment, rape, killing, armed robbery, exploitation of environmental resources (illegal artisanal mining, lead poisoning) and large-scale rustling. Conflicts between farmers and herders evolved from the North-central region into other parts of the country, with deadly attacks and loss of lives, displacements, and property. Amnesty International 2020 report revealed that more than 1,500 people died in inter-communal violence, mostly between herdsmen and farming communities, as well as in attacks by bandits, in the region (Ojo, 2022).

The decades of primordial conflict between the herders and farmers was reinvigorated in 2018 and continues to abate the security experiences in the northern region. According to Human Rights Watch, more than 1,600 innocent Nigerians were killed and more than 300,000 were equally displaced. Although there were lesser reprisal attacks against the Fulani settlements by the farmers, however, it is believed that some terrorist groups were secretively active in this conflict to fuel insecurity in the country. The incessant attacks on the civilian populace by the Fulanis forced the implementation of a law against open-grazing in some states such as Benue and Taraba in both the North-Central and North-East regions (Ojo, 2020 in Abwage & Bako,2024).Individual citizens to participate in terrorism, both external and internal factors have been considered. In Africa, internal factors are perceived within the milieu of poverty, ethno-religious persecution, deprivation, political marginalization and socio-economic injustices that pervade the region, while external factors such as globalization and foreign policies that are beyond national or continental control also need to be taken into consideration.

In the Hobbesian state of nature men lived without a government and consequently, there were no laws to regulate men. Thus, each man is a sovereign and might is right. Three issues emanate from the above condition: Competition (where men contend of strive to have equal for endless power for self-protection and preservation of the fruits gotten from nature), and vain glory (the vain conceit of one's own wisdom and strength which makes men think of having more than any other man in terms of strength, wisdom, reputation). Ake, C. (1996:8) captured the above realities in relation to the Nigerian State when he noted that: much of what is uniquely negative about politics in Africa arises from the character of the state particularly its lack of autonomy, the immensity of its power, its

proneness to abuse and the lack of immunity against it. The character of the state rules out a politics of moderation and mandates.

A state where equal rights are given to un-equals and/or where the laws governing the distribution of resources are polarized and manipulated in the name of politics is clearly in a relationship with the Hobbesian State of Nature. Extreme value placed on politics in the northern Nigeria states has plunged her into a condition of fierce guerilla-like competition, unhealthy quest for power and vain glory (where some thinks it's their natural rights to rule others) at the expense of the ruled who are supposed to be beneficiaries. The lives of men pauperized and denied of their rights flood the streets as they leave in continual fear of violent death. Terrorist groups and leaders of rogue state take ready advantage of the prevailing anarchy (Rosa, 2005 in Collins et al, 2017). For some, arms proliferation is orchestrated by the conviction that the State can no longer guarantee the fundamental duty of ensuring the security, interests and welfare of its citizenry when violent attacks become imminent and or when the need to provide infrastructural needs of the people becomes illusive. Thus, this paper seeks to interrogate the changing facade of insecurity and wishes to provide contextual and theoretical explanations regarding ungoverned spaces, Jihad and the conquest desire of religious fanatics and explain why north has become an epicentre for breeding terrorist consortia and organized criminal networks, high poverty level etc.

METHODS

The study relied on data generated from documentary sources such as journals, official publications, books chapters, newspapers and magazines as well online materials.

Theoretical Framework

The state of nature is a concept used in moral and political philosophy, religion, social contract theories and international law to denote the hypothetical conditions of what the lives of people might have been like before societies came into existence. Although, there are three main social contract theorists; Hobbes, Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau . This study is however concerned with Hobbes' version of the state of nature.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was an Englishman who lived in the days of the Civil War. This fact is important in explaining the nature of his political thought, for, as will be shown presently. Hobbes was inclined towards absolutism. This inclination was natural at a time

when the most important need of his country was a strong Government to maintain law and order (Appadorai, 2004). He starts his political inquiry (The Leviathan,1651) with an analysis of human nature: Man is essentially selfish; he is moved to action not by his intellect or reason, but by his appetites, desires and passions. Men living without any common power set over them, i.e. in a state of nature, would be in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man, not war in the organized sense but a perpetual struggle of all against all, competition, diffidence and love of glory being the three main cause. Law and justice are absent. The life of a man is Solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

Hobbes posit that; since all seek to satisfy their desires, and since there is no one summum bonum, or highest good, for men, but rather a constant succession of appetites, what each human most wants is not any particular thing but the generalized capacity to satisfy new desires as they emerge to assure forever, the way of his future desire. To this end, Hobbes posits that power; consist in eminence and is therefore the marginal advantage of control enjoyed by one human over other human beings (Rufus & Eyo,2017). Drawing from the above assumption, Hobbes envisioned his own version of the state of nature. This he argues will be a situation of conflict, uncertainty and violence in which the survival of each is threatened by the very means each adopts to secure it. In fact, he noted that there is a sinister, if perfectly explicable, asymmetry of such hope: inasmuch as men being proud will hardly believe there be many so wise as themselves. For they see their own wit at hands, and other men at distance (Rufus & Eyo,2017).

The direct consequence of the above is that should any two or more men desire the same thing there will be conflict, violence and perhaps even death. Conflict according to Hobbes can thus arise from any attempt by humans to satisfy their desires, for men's action: the notions of Right and Wrong, justice and injustice have there no place and they may kill another for anything they deem necessary to their life.It is instructive to notice that the cause of violence as posited by Hobbes is derive from the very qualities which are commonly thought of as being the basis of human political sociability, our supposed equality and rationality. Although Hobbes uses the device of a state of nature, the conflict in it does not arise because there are intellectually primitive or beast-like: quite the opposite: it arises from their equality, and a presumption of their equal skill and sophistication at reasoning.

The nature of the state makes the capture of state power, irresistibly attractive. The winners in the competition for power win everything, the losers lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing nothing, nothing better than winning. Thus, everyone seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics which does not know legitimacy or legality, only expediency. This politics is not conducive to political stability, the rule of law or to democracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consequent upon the failure of successive governments since 1999, to institute good governance that would secure the socio-economic well-being of the average Nigerian, there has been a resultant political backlash distance (Rufus & Eyo,2017). The political leaders have been generally viewed to be insensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people for a dignified life. The prevalence of hunger and poverty are enough dangers to challenge the legitimacy of any constituted authority through protest and demands for change as experienced from Nigerians from 1st August to 10th August, 2024. The two challenges; hunger and poverty, in particular, have been complicated by the growing youth unemployment as well as the systematic denial of the right type education to some other underprivileged members of the nation. The attendant frustration has given rise to further insecurity which is manifested in the violent sectarian clashes, ethnic strife, rising case of assassination as well as kidnappings for ransom. This development tends to justify the theory that: State weakness and poor governance, particularly the state's failure to manage natural resource exploitation effectively and equitably, also strongly influence the opportunity for and feasibility for rebellion as it affects the relative strength of the state being challenged (Development and Cooperation, 2003:443 in Adeniran, 2013).

Nigeria as a nation-State is at a fast retrogression into a seeming Hobbesian state. The prevalence of conflict, crises, rancour, social disorder, brutality, man's inhumanity to man, and the existential fear of insecurity are greatly unabated. Amidst all these, poverty, and the indiscriminate spread of diseases looms large, depicting this setting in the dark. One cannot but say, that the Nigerian malady is immensely conspicuous; it is nothing, but one calling for urgent remedial attention. The tendency of political actors to use violence in the electoral process is defined by the state's capacity to enforce law and order. Sadly, this

capacity is undermined by the erosion of the state's monopoly of the use of violence. Nigeria is gravely challenged by the activities of "cult gangs", "area boys", ethnic militias, unlicensed vigilante groups, and armed bandits that operate in rural and urban areas (Adewale 2005, Pratten 2006, and Fourchard 2008). The Nigerian state monopoly of violence is being challenged because it is weak. A country that depends on just one commodity (crude) as a source of revenue was always susceptible to external influence.

The level of unemployed/poor people in Nigeria is quite alarming. Since the inception of democratic governance in 1999, the federal government of Nigeria has done little, if not nothing, to improve on human rights and protection of its citizen's life and property as one of their cardinal responsibilities. Instead they turn to be a threat to the wellbeing and corporate existence of their citizens as part of their mandate and statutory responsibility as contained in the constitution (Ibrahim, 2013). The above scenario has made some resistance group like: the defunct Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the present-day Niger Delta Avengers to sprang up in the Niger Delta region, the Boko-Haram menace in the North and the agitation of the Igbos in the South-East for independence under the platform of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

Another security challenge is the ungoverned spaces. Ungoverned spaces are areas where the state institutions cannot exercise their full authority. The Boko- Haram has continued to exploit the ungovernability of the forest to carry out their daily operational mobility. Moreover, some of the bandits' operations are also linked to ungoverned spaces. For instance, the activities of bandits are carried out in unguarded forests, such as Kinyanbana, Fagore and Kamuku forests in northern Nigeria. The Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma, and Sububu forests have become major hideouts for criminals (Jah & Oruenagbe, 2021). In this context, governance revolves outside of the established state authority. The replacement of formal governance structures with informal edifices has an impact on the functionality of the social environment which is controlled by the local populace. The existence of illegitimate governance therefore promotes a new form of local security and protection for the people.

Such an environment necessitates the emergence and control of non-state local-armed men, in this regard, their claim generates a long-term structure and territorial command within the area. This necessitates the existence of dual actors, namely state and non-state within the same territory. For instance, non-state actors may provide local security such as

a vigilante group and waste disposal, concomitantly; the state can make provision for banking services, electricity and water. Some of the attributes of ungoverned territories include the lack of penetration by the formal institutions, the absence of a law enforcement agency, health-care facilities and welfare institutions.

Evans, (2015) state that in ungoverned spaces, non-state actors are fillers of state authorities, establishing their writ as alternative power centres, supplanting the functionality of the state. The spaces termed 'ungoverned' usually come under the control of warlords, tribal leaders and criminal gangs with established physical presence in control of carved territory within existing state boundaries and having the capacity to challenge the legitimacy, authority and sovereignty of the country. The absence of these fundamental state institutions to dictate the rules and regulations of everyday life therefore encourage the citizens to look for succour especially from the tribal leaders, warlords and informal networks for judicial remedies and protection (Jah &Iruonagbe,2021).

The lack of state presence also manifests in low adherence to the state laws. In such an environment, illegal activities such as unlawful exploration of natural resources and smuggling could attract little or no attention by the state security agency to apprehend the perpetrators. Furthermore, it should also be noted that ungoverned spaces are the bye-product of political decisions that were made by the state managers intending to manage such an environment through informal networks.

Similarly, the jihadist activities in the north do not also help matters as regards to insecurity. The motivational factors in Western or civilized societies differ from developing nations, especially in Africa. In a research project that was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aimed at tracing the root causes of extremism in Africa, where more than 350 apprehended extremists were interviewed from Nigeria, Uganda, Somalia, Niger, Cameroon and Kenya they all claimed that they were not influenced by religious doctrines. They were rather enthused by the long experience of deprivation, they claimed that they were not subject to the government's positive contribution to help their state of poverty nor did they experience a basic provision from the state, with respect to secular education or health (Ojo,2020).

These youths considered themselves to be victims of a failed state; their abodes became an enabling environment for terrorist exploitation and recruitment. They had no trust in political office holders, police or the military institutions. The ideology behind violent

extremism is delivered with a flexible marketing strategy, where extremist groups tailor their message for potential recruits. For the unemployed or the poor, they offer paid jobs; for marginalized ethnic and religious minorities, they offer recourse through violence; and for the middle class, they offer an adventure, a sense of purpose, and an escape from mundanely. Now the one-thousand-dollar question is, why are the most attacked communities are mostly occupied by people who are neither Muslim nor Fulani? When we talk about the insecurity nature of Southern parts of Taraba and Kaduna; Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa States etc, while their counterpart of the same regions and state, experiences safety and comfort ability.

The question now is, does the insecurity in our area has anything to do with politics or religion? As Kittrie (1981:300) in Agara et al, (2017) noted, for a terrorist action to qualify as being politically motivated, it must "Challenge the state but affect no private rights of innocent parties." On the other hand, religious motivated terrorism (Boko Haram) differs from political terrorism primarily on the basis that; first, while political terrorism attempts to find solution within the times of the perpetrators, while religious terrorism outlives their participants (Agara, etal, 2017).

This is predicated on the belief that the rewards of those involved are trans-temporal and the time limit of their struggle is eternity. Also target of religious terrorism are not chosen for their military, political or economic value but rather they are chosen for the sole aim of making an impact on public consciousness both by its brutality and suddenness. The constant recourse to a "god" to justify their actions has the power of "Satanizing" the enemies while making the perpetrators views of religious terrorism "godly."

As Juergensmeyer, (2002) in Agara etal,(2017) had noted, this is a kind of "perverse performance of power meant to enable the perpetrators views of the world while drawing viewers into their notions of cosmic war". The effect of this, as he had also noted, is "not so much that religion has become politicised but that politic has become religionised. The divine nature of religious terrorism, the notion that the battle is between good and bad, truth and evil, the expectation of heavenly rewards for the terrorists all rule out the possibility of a compromise or peaceful resolution in this life time.

The Middle-Belt/North-Central region was divided between indigenous communities that were densely populated by Christians and Hausa-Fulani Muslim migrants. However, public discourse on the conflicts was circumscribed as being the contestation for economic

resources, the press did not mention the religious disposition of the area. It could also have been portrayed as attacks on these communities amounted to a declaration of war against the Christian population. This conflict could also be viewed as an attempt by Hausa-Fulani Muslim communities to expand their horizons and domination pushing their boundaries Southward. This perspective shifts away from the migration and climate change perspective to Islamic hegemonic tendency through Darul Islam which was sustained during the colonial period (1903–1960) and the post-military regime (1999–2014), which made the Christian population of Middle-Belt/North-Central areas more vulnerable to incessant killings.

The spread of conflict into Middle-Belt/Southern states is aggravating already fragile relations among the country's major regional, ethnic and religious groups. The South's majority Christian communities resent the influx of predominantly Muslim herders, portrayed in some narratives as an "Islamisation force" or terrorism. The recent report has revealed that "Jihadist groups have recruited heavily from Fulani pastoralists", and this "has raised tensions with members of other ethnic groups who felt they are targeted by the jihadists. It has also been claimed from the perspective of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims as an expansion to propagate Darul Islam to surmount the Middle-Belt/North-Central region (Ojo, 2022)

In the light of recent security developments in various regions of Nigeria, it is safe to assert that Nigeria is faced with a myriad of multidimensional security challenges, which pose threats to the country's national security. The lives of Nigerians have never been a better attestation to poverty than it is presently, to satisfy the "poor" variable of the Hobbesian "state of nature." The insensitivity, inconsiderateness, crudity, cruelty and the meanness of the leadership and their agents help to fill the slot of the "nasty" variable. The "brutish" aspect of the Nigerian state is seen in the wickedness of the rape of its people psychologically and materially. Hardly can one disassociate the Nigerian state from the Hobbesian state of nature as the leaders continue to keep power by all means and undo the state, siphoning monies meant for development into private pocket by all means, while some others do anything (including mean things) in the name of survival.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is confronted with a multifaceted security crisis that spans across various regions, threatening national stability and socio-economic development. The emergence of groups like Boko-Haram, ISWAP, and the activities of armed Bandicts and Fulani herdsmen have intensified insecurity, leading to the lost of lives, displacement, and economic devastation. The phenomena of ungoverned spaces exacerbates the situation, providing fertile ground for criminal activities and terrorist exploitation. Also, the activities of Jihadist who compounded the security with religious colouration.

However, the root causes of extremism in Nigeria are deeply entrenched in socio-economic grievances, political marginalization and governance failures. The inability of the State to provide basic services and address the grievance of marginalized communities has fuelled recruitment into extremist groups. Religious and ethnic tensions further exacerbate the conflict, leading to a cycle of violence and reprisal attacks.

Recommendations

Strengthen Governance: The Nigerian government must enhance its capacity to provide basic services, promote inclusive governance, and address grievances among marginalised communities; investing in healthcare, infrastructure, and job creation programmes to alleviate poverty and reduce vulnerability to extremist recruitment.

Improve Security Measures: Security agencies need to be adequately equipped, trained and motivated to effectively combat terrorism and criminal activities. Enhanced intelligence gathering, border security, and collaborative with regional and international partners are essential to disrupt terrorist networks and prevent cross border movement.

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