



Article

The Changing Role of Non-State Actors in Nigeria's Security Sector

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Abstract

The research, through the lens of Defence Realism, scrutinised non-violent NSAs' functions and obligations in Nigeria's security sector. The paper, through content analysis, argues that although the abuse of power is sometimes carried out by these NSAs, most times, if properly trained and guided, are well organised and work to support state apparatus. It then concludes that, Nigeria's NSAs, like those of other states, emerge as an alternative to state security's failure to provide adequate security for the lives and properties of its citizens. The paper concludes by urging the Nigerian state to commit to encouraging entities with solutions to insecurity to come up with them. The paper makes a case for collaborative policing, jointly managed by the state and the NSAs. It suggests that organised means of engaging non-violent NSAs through delegating specific obligations to them would help curb insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords:

International System, Non-state Actors, Non-violent non-state Actors, Sovereignty, Nation-state.

Introduction

The history of sovereign states in the international system is often traced back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648: a stepping stone in the development of modern state system. Prior to this period, the European medieval organisation of political authority was based on a vaguely hierarchical religious order. More than the Peace of Westphalia, the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 is thought to reflect an emerging norm that sovereign states had no internal equals within a defined territory and no external superiors as the ultimate authority within the territory's sovereign borders. Thus, the centuries of roughly 1500 to 1789 which saw the rise of independent sovereign states, the institutionalisation of diplomacy and the French Revolution, added the new idea that not princes or oligarchies, but the citizenry of a state, identified as the nation, should be referred to as sovereign. Such a state in which the nation is sovereign would then be termed a nation-state as opposed to a monarchy or theocracy (Hoffmann, 1970). An alternative model of the nation-state was developed in reaction to the French republican concept by the Germans and others, who instead of giving the citizenry sovereignty, kept the princes and nobility but defined nation-statehood in ethnic-linguistic terms, establishing the ideal that all people speaking one language should belong to one state only. The same claim to sovereignty was made for both forms of nation-state. However, in Europe today (2023), many states are hardly any ethnically homogeneous, thereby debunking the conception of statehood in ethnic-linguistic terms. It was this European state system, supposing the sovereign equality of states, that was exported to the Americas, Africa, and Asia via colonialism and the standards of civilization (Lord-Mallam, 2012).

The contemporary international system was finally established through decolonisation during the Cold War. Nevertheless, one major controversy that has trailed the understanding of the concept 'International System' bothered on the inadequacy of assigning the term system to the act of intermingling of states and

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non-state actors (NSAs) in the international arena (Akinola, (2015). This inadequacy stemmed from strict scientific notion of system and is because scientifically, mechanical or biological systems are natural and can be subjected to intrinsic scientific methodologies. The international system on the other hand, is considered to be artificial thus, an abstraction which cannot be subjected to scientific intrinsic methodologies. The general concept of international system has its foundation in the works of System theorists in the field of international relations. Scholars in the field have developed basic frameworks to establish the basis on which the international arena can be regarded as a system. They regard nation-states as actors, always standing in interaction with each other thus, making the whole world take the form of an organised complexity (Hoffmann, 1970). However, in the intermingling of states and NSAs in the international arena, there is the idea of shared or overlapping obligations between state actors and NSAs leading to conflicts in policy circles. While state actors are formal authorities known for their interaction with other states in the international system, NSAs have come to play significant role in state affairs in the 21st century. Essentially, NSAs are now globally known and accepted although with inhibitions (Ataman,2018). The problem however, is the inability of society to differentiate between NSAs who are non-violent and the violent ones. This second category are currently taking the stage with violent activism while the non-violent, are quietly supporting the state to ensure security in states in the international system.

Currently, the world is troubled by natural catastrophes: civil war, global epidemics, terrorism, economic inequality, authoritarian rule, populism, rising crime, violence and so on. At the same time, traditional political and social institutions are experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction and there is the pressure on governments to deliver on Western liberal democracies. The international order since the Cold War has been deconstructed and reconstructed. As it is, non-violent actors seem to be wielding even more influence and applying newer approaches to problems on global politics much to the detriment of traditional thinking. Thus, the state as the primary actor is under enormous pressure to mainstream non-violent NSAs into governance in states especially in the aspect of securing it. The challenge however, is the fact that NSAs hitherto, have all being lumped altogether as bad and without defined roles even though recent (7TH October, 2023) events i.e., the attack on Israel by Hamas (a terrorist group), underscores how the influence by NSAs and individuals is growing in world politics. This development has been supported by an atmosphere in which the flow of both information and disinformation enables the adoption of narratives not necessarily based on sound facts and objective knowledge. Thus, the stage has changed for states and opened up the space for anyone who can create a competing narrative to become an actor in the international system (Hafer et al., 2012). Thus, NSAs whether violent or non-violent, are frequently coming on stage as players in international politics.

It is important to note that NSAs in general, can be on either side of the security spectrum. In other words, they can either be the cause of insecurity or the solution to insecurity. Sometimes too, as a result of inadequate training, they apply excessive force to maintain order, which is an aberration to the norm. Hence, it is from this standpoint that we will be discussing non-violent NSAs who serve to bring about solutions to insecurity.

Evidently, the weakening role of states in global politics has long been predicted as a consequence of this. Our traditional democratic political and social institutions are being questioned and confronted from several directions by NSAs whether violent or non-violent in nature. Nigeria, a state rich in both human and natural resources with huge potentials undoubtedly, battles the insurgence of violent NSAs such as Boko Haram, bandits, kidnappers, militants, cult groups, Asari Dokubo, Dogo Gide, civilian joint task force (CJTF) etc. (similar to those of other states in the international system), who have become co-actors with the state on the stage.

On the other hand, Nigeria, also has quite a number of non-violent NSAs who, given the enabling environment, have been performing excellently in support of government; ensuring security in this West African sub-region of Africa. They include groups such as Civil Societies and individuals. Unfortunately,

the activities of violent NSAs overshadow those of the non-violent actors who stand in support of the government to eradicate insecurity which has brought untold hardship upon the citizenry and created a sense of neglect among them against the state. It is therefore, the changing role occupied by these non-violent NSAs in Nigeria, that this research investigated. This is meant to contribute to the ongoing discussion on the need to mainstream non-violent NSAs overlapping obligations with the state, and transform their role into complimentary ones to fill the security gaps in states facing insurgencies, internal conflicts and wars.

Literature Review

In this section, a few literature on the role of NSAs are reviewed to give insight to the position of this paper. Thus, in order to understand the impacts of NSAs on security, it is important to understand who they are. NSAs are any form of organisations and individuals that are not recognised as independent and sovereign by states. Usually, they are not affiliated with, directed by, or funded through the government. These include corporations, private financial institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as some paramilitary and armed resistance groups with focus on human rights. NSAs can be classified into international organisations (Red Cross, United Nations and so on), and formations such as Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and the militants in South-South Nigeria.

It is worthy of note however that, NSAs arise whenever there is an imminent need to serve and protect the people; a need that the legitimate security forces most times do not have adequate manpower to meet. In the case of most African states, there is a number of factors activating NSAs. Some of these factors are weak institutions, lack of good governance, inadequate security forces, weak economies, illiteracy, poverty, over-population and so on. Thus, NSAs only arise when there is a gap between good governance and the citizenry or sometimes because of corrupt practices among leaders. The importance of NSAs cannot be under-estimated even though they too often witness problems. This mainly stems from the fact that they are most times not properly trained and have no constitutional provisions for the roles they play (Warner et al., 2012).

Hence, Denny (2014), opines that the inevitable uprising of NSAs, is as the inevitable plurality of security forces. For him, this is often due to the weakness or inefficiency of legal state-recognised institutions to provide security. Thus, Denny (2014:251) states that "...despite a high degree of awareness that security and justice are routinely provided by a plural set of actors in the 'global South', donor-supported reforms of the security and justice sectors remain overwhelmingly state-centric in focus". This is facilitated in part by the belief that plurality exists primarily because of state weakness, and that as the state delivers improved security and justice services, alternative providers will cease to be relevant. This simply means that NSAs usually arise in situations where legitimate state actors have ultimately failed in providing the services they were created for. Nonetheless, Hazbun (2016), believes that inefficiency is not the only reason why NSAs arise. To him, the political instability of any state can lead to a decline in security. Thus, while looking at the in-depth correlation of political stability in states, Hazbun (2016) suggests that instability in a state can make the state weak and in turn give way for crime and injustice thereby weakening the strength of such a state in a regional context. This can also be seen in the case of Nigeria where in her 63 years, has had a complicated history of a total of nine coups and four transitions to democratic rule. This complicated history created a vacuum in the security sector and gave impetus to violent NSAs.

Lar (2017), points out that the opposition to NSAs in the security sector has not been matched with enough evidence to categorically understand their impact on security in Nigeria. However, Ebo (2012), believes that NSAs play a very fundamental role in the peacebuilding of any post-war society. Their impact on security governance has been recorded to be effective in rebuilding societal structures. Although Bowie (2016), argues that internal actors have their own private agenda, which might not favour society at large but may favour smaller interest groups, it is important to note that every state is

conscious of its internal security. The failure of a state to provide security creates a void that NSAs fill. One of the major reasons the concept of 'state' exist is to provide security for the lives and property in its territory. It is this protection that aligns the reasoning behind the social contract as theorised by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jack Rousseau. Therefore, when a state begins to fail in its primary objective; a contingency plan is almost inevitable.

The idea of statism to Davis (2009), cannot be separated from defence realism in the sense that defence realism signifies the nature of a state as an actor while statism refers to the belief that a state should be able to control its affairs both externally and internally. In other words, it is almost natural for groups of people to come together in defence of their community. A typical example is the 2023 coup in Niger that caused a division in opinions in Nigeria based on cultural ties. While the Nigerian state saw the need to intervene in Niger as an ECOWAS member, the communities bordering Niger rose against it because of cultural ties with Nigeriens. Davis (2009:226) states that "...in order to defend or establish its sovereignty, a state engages in inter-state warfare". This dynamic could readily describe the sets of allegiances, loyalties, and impacts of guerrilla forces and other more conventionally defined violent NSAs who might view themselves as alternatives fighting against an oppressive state, as seen in Sudan, Somalia, Congo, and other states caught in the vicious cycle of civil or political conflicts. Therefore, in theory, it is only formidable that groups that show the propensity to either pose violence or control violence in communities become active during conflicts. These groups are often compensated by state forces since they complement the security gaps that the legitimate authorities cannot bridge. Thus, the decaying infrastructure, deteriorating democratic accountability, and inadequate capacity of the security forces amongst others; are pointers to the pervasive failures of successive Nigerian governments and have facilitated both Boko Haram (violent) or other armed groups such as the CJTF (non-violent) in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework: Defence Realism

Defence Realism, formulated by Kenneth Waltz explains the inevitability of NSAs in the security sector. Defence Realism is a structural theory of international relations that theorises that the power struggle in the international system allows for states to adapt, create and moderate policies that allow them to attain maximum internal security (Dougherty& Pfaltzgraff, Jr, 1990).It also supports the traditional realist assumptions that survival is the principal goal of every state actor and that given the anarchical nature of the international system, states require to constantly ensure that they have sufficient power to defend themselves and advance interests required for survival. This theory has been used to justify the acquisition of nuclear weapons by powerful states in the international system. The theory asserts that the creation of defensive mechanisms only arises from the existence of an offensive realism which is imminent in the international system. In other words, Waltz proposed that states conform and react to the threats they face internally and externally which leads them to operate on contingency plans and NSAs are a form of contingency to deal with the alarming conflict. This aligns with traditional thinking of realists who assume states as primary actors and would do anything (including participating in joint security and the creation of local groups) to protect their territories and ensure state survival as the international system is presumed anarchical in nature. Defence Realism is thus, adopted as tool for the analysis of the changing role of non-violent NSAs in securing Nigeria.

Emergence of Non-Violent NSAs in Nigeria's Security Sector

The world stage as we know, has many players engaged in international affairs. One of the oldest and universally acknowledged actors on the modern world stage is the state. While states are still the dominant actors on the world stage, they are by no means the only ones in modern world. Other non-state players include intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and individuals which are established by states and usually through a treaty. The state-centric international system has since been grappling with accommodating the rise of private authority in all aspects of international politics and law since inception. The role played by NSAs is actively being felt at the domestic level as well; and is now common place

for NSAs to deliver public goods and services such as security, policing, health and education which used to be mainly a governmental role i.e., (Hazbun, 2016).

Globally, the involvement of NSAs in the security sector started and has been rising phenomenally since 1945 when the Second World War ended. We have established that NSAs can fall on either side of the security spectrum; they can be the propagators of existing violence or acting as an aid to ending such violence. In other words, NSAs can be violent or non-violent in nature. Over the course of the last century, NSAs have proliferated and assumed state-like functions (Weiss et al., 2013). Although, issuing obligations for NSAs might spur political setbacks and legal uncertainty which might encourage states to renege on their responsibilities, it is however, an idea whose time has come. It has become obvious that NSAs' role in state-like functions could be instrumental for regulating them better and holding them accountable in cases of misconduct towards right holders. This is precisely the reason why laying down obligations on NSAs is key for preventing loopholes in the legal protection system (Clapham, 2006; Odello and Beruto (eds), 2009). In this regard, a heterogeneous group of actors that have different operational principles and *raison d'être* such as organisations or even armed groups offering professional services should be incorporated and given specific roles to play in combating terrorism. Therefore, understanding NSAs' expected roles and responsibilities is inextricably entangled with the quest for state security. Although states are recognised as having the primary obligation to ensure the realisation of this goal, partnership with NSAs often work on the basis of the principle of 'shared but differentiated' responsibilities. The linkage between the functions taken up by states and NSAs requires us to reflect upon their obligations in tandem. Hence, state and NSAs assume complementary functions as a part of governance structures in all modern state systems. This is in line with Waltz proposal which argues that states conform and react to the threats they face both internally and externally through operating contingency plans and NSAs are a form of contingency to deal with the alarming conflict.

Since traditionally, the security of the state lies within state structures and institutions and at the frontline of defence, the state's first response in internal security is the Police Force. Hence, the Nigerian Police Force is tasked with the primary objective of providing security in every part of the country. However, due to rising security challenges and the resultant fall in manpower in police force and growing humanitarian crisis all across the country, the Nigerian government has been forced to utilise whatever it has at its disposal to provide security. The idea of geo-political zones in Nigeria coming up with security apparatuses such as Civilian joint task force (CJTF) in North East Nigeria, Amotekun in South West Nigeria, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in South East Nigeria and the likes; are all aimed at tackling insecurity in these zones. This move has given room for the active involvement and engagement of NSAs in Nigeria.

Mainstreaming the Role of NSAs in Nigeria

NSAs all over the world have received a wide range of attention because of their ability to meet security needs in a constantly conflictual international system. The third wave of democratisation facilitated the growth of NSAs in global governance. Hence, as earlier stated, "...NSAs have not only participated in global peace but have also been involved in its construction" (Weiss et al, 2013:13). Many developing states struggle with control of their territories as a result of insurgency which renders state security apparatus incapable; thereby creating a wide gap of need. This gap is usually filled by NSAs as is the case of the CJTF in the conflict in North East Nigeria. Since the end of military rule in 1999 and the transition into democratic rule, the Nigerian military and security forces have not had it easy securing Nigeria from diverse dimensions of insecurity such as election related conflicts, communal clashes, insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, police brutality and so on. These security challenges expose the weaknesses of the Nigerian state in dealing with security and created a gap that could only be filled by NSAs who end up playing a vital role in ensuring peace. Such individuals as Mohammed Yusuf of Boko Haram, Dogo Gide, Simon Ekpa, Sunday Igboho, Tompolo, Charles Okah, Asari Dokubo and their likes have at one point or the other, played violent roles in state affairs; while, the state acts to combat them.

On the flip side are the CJTF in the North East of Nigeria, the Amotekun in the Western part of Nigeria and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in Eastern Nigeria who, as a creation of the state, play supportive roles in their geo-political zones. Their involvement point to the emerging and significant role NSAs have come to occupy in Nigeria.

In a political environment where governments are increasingly preoccupied with protecting themselves against information warfare; trust in the political institutions will only dwindle further as opportunists make the most of this new phenomenon and gap in governance. With the issue of terrorism and other vices on the increase, the role of NSAs in responding to terrorism cannot be over-emphasised. This is why in Nigeria, the approach to tackling these issues has moved from mainly the realm of the state to include non-violent NSAs who, in supporting the government can bring about security. Non-violent NSAs mostly NGOs around the world add immensely to the security and maintenance of peace and order. They are first responders in crisis situation because of their nearness to the people. Thus, Denny (2014) opines that the involvement of local groups can be advantageous since they are more familiar with the community and its people. Although, there is also the argument that the involvement of NSAs would create a plurality of security outfits that developing states like Nigeria, may not be able to properly handle. This position occupies a secondary place in the case of Nigeria since the need to engage these non-violent NSAs is more crucial to state survival. Thus, it agrees with the thinking of Defence Realism which assumes states as primary actors who would do anything to protect their territory and ensure their survival. From time, Defence Realism has been used to justify the acquisition of nuclear weapons by powerful states in the international system. The theory asserts that the creation of defensive mechanisms only arises from the existence of an offensive realism which is imminent in the international system. In other words, it is as Wagner (2010), proposed that states conform and react to the threats they face internally and externally which leads them to operate on contingency plans and NSAs are a form of contingency to deal with the alarming conflict.

Additionally, beyond the argument that alternative security exists because the state is weakened, locally sourced NSAs become relevant because of their strong links to the culture and tradition of the community, as well as the greater congruence between alternative sources and the social attitudes and norms of communities thereby providing the needed legitimacy that the state lacks. Worthy of note is that in the last two decades, NSAs have acquired legal recognition due to their heavy involvement in the international affairs. Their growing presence as an alternative to governmental presence also holds them accountable to international law (Bowie, 2016). The United Nations Security Council's decision allows the self-defence principle to be applied against violent NSAs. This was after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 when the US and the UN debated whether the right of self-defence, as provided by the UN Charter's Article 51, was applicable to armed NSAs; in this case Al-Qaeda. Article 51 allows member states to pursue a pre-emptive self-defence if they know that an imminent attack is coming. Many issues still remain on the extent to which the potential victim state could retaliate against the armed NSA since most armed NSAs often reside on the territory of a sovereign state, which thus may also endure a retaliatory or pre-emptive attack as is the case with the attack on Israel by Hamas on 7th October 2023. Thus, while non-violent NSAs are incredibly useful in advancing international peace, monitoring human rights violations, and lobbying for socio-political issues like climate change, they also play a role in non-traditional governance as many fragile states rely on NSAs for protection and administration (Bowie, 2016).

Worthy of note however, is that being careful to ensure that the prevailing societal norms are maintained is important since alternative security to the state are not necessarily going to disappear when the capacity of the state to provide security improves (Denny, 2014:254). In other words, if the state remains relatively weak in providing security or any other social amenities for its citizens, NSAs are bound to reappear. In the case of the CJTF (made of indigenous people of Borno state), in the North East of Nigeria, their skills have been required in mapping out attacks against Boko Haram. The contribution of the CJTF in the fight against Boko Haram has been significant enough to have received recognition by the Nigerian state

(Akinola, 2015). The application of locally sourced NSAs i.e., CJTF, created job opportunities for youths and reduced crime rates within the region since the emergence of Boko Haram which enabled for the inflow of more resources into the state to tackle insecurity. Again, the fact that NSAs if not properly managed after conflict can become a menace, then means proper checks must be in place to ensure their continuous engagement beyond the conflict time otherwise, a new form of insecurity would emerge. They must continue to be relevant in the security sector and serve as a direct link between the state and the people as this would shield them from becoming preys to the terrorist group, they earlier on resisted; and also encourage subsequent actors to join in contributing their quota to the state.

NSAs must be so organised to render security related services post-conflict time. To Defence realism, power and national interest are the most important factors in state control. Therefore, the dilution of power allows for plurality, which in turn possess a new form of threat to national security. Thus, to Defence realism, if power is allowed between the state and NSAs, the future of the state would be unpredictable. This unpredictability of the actions of NSAs would lead to various crimes being committed with no one to bear the consequence. In this wise therefore, Nigeria must continue to train non-violent NSAs and even provide them with an identity (uniforms) for recognition; so as to keep them relevant in providing security information and not get detached from reality. The Nigerian government must consider putting in place the legal framework to legalise them. Hence, amending the Nigerian constitution to allow for the recognition of community policing is essential. Currently, the Nigerian Police Force and the Civil Defence are the only bodies constitutionally vested with power to secure Nigeria internally. For NSAs to ensure proper policing and function properly, it is important that the Nigerian state recognises them formally by enacting legislations in their favour. Of-course this includes participating in joint security and the creation of local groups to maintain security since NSAs have been known for their rapid response to conflict situations. They are able to successfully penetrate conflict areas and gather information that have proven too difficult for the Nigerian military and the paramilitary. The creation of non-violent NSAs is therefore a defensive approach in dealing with insecurity in Nigeria.

Conclusion:

This paper propositions that non-violent NSAs have not only participated in global peace but have also been involved in its construction; therefore, the disadvantages that come with engaging NSAs arise from the fact they are not properly profiled and trained and there is no constitutional provision backing their existence. Their positive impacts, have been immense in tackling insurgency in states undergoing conflicts. Thus, for NSAs to function effectively, Nigeria must be able to first create an atmosphere that supports their involvement. Hence, the Nigerian citizenry together with the government must have to share the responsibility of bringing up ideas that are potentially viable to blossom into governance solution. It is therefore, recommended that:

Recommendations

1. A conducive political environment should first exist if the Nigerian state wishes to invest more in the security sector through NSAs.
2. There needs to be a “no tolerance” policy on the abuse of human rights and freedom. The current state forces (Nigerian Police Force and other paramilitary forces) must be properly trained and controlled by the Nigerian state to avoid abuse.
3. There is therefore the need to begin the profiling, legal processes and inclusion of more non-violent NSAs than it is today, who are relevant, to support the security sector in Nigeria.

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