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## Strategic Culture and Nigeria's National Security Policy in the Fourth Republic: A Descriptive Overview

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### **Abstract**

*Strategically, Nigeria is of great importance in the War against terror in the West African sub-region. The fundamentalist and extremist terrorist groups in the country have metamorphosed into transnational units with global and regional links provoking the state into adopting traditional measures of counterterrorism which are mainly military actions that have escalated rather than resolved the conflicts that trigger and sustain the violence in many parts of the country. In recent years, Nigeria has battled the threat of terror and several policies involving traditional use of force and some preventive measures have been adopted. While many scholars have attempted to understand the behavior of the Nigerian state with regards to its reactionary policies, very few, if any have tried to locate these strategic preferences within the context of its strategic culture. This paper presents an analysis of the literature debates on strategic culture and explores this subject using the strategic culture theory of Jack Snyder, to demonstrate the link between Nigeria's strategic culture and its behavior nationally and within the region, particularly in relation to dealing with internal security challenges, has been a product of its strategic culture.*

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**Key Words:** *Strategic Culture, Threat Perception, Counterterrorism Policy, Nigeria, National Security Policy*

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Strategic culture has grown in significance and importance in the field of strategic studies (Zaman, 2009:68). Strategic culture is also a key factor in understanding security policy (Graham, 2014:1). Theoretically, it offers a convenient compromise of critical theory and realism in a way that allows for analysis of human aspects of military and political operations (Horton-Eddison, 2017:1). Although the methodological debates, about strategic culture analysis persist, the subject matter has attracted significant scholarly progress (Zaman, 2009:82). Strategic culture comprises of perceptions, values, attitudes and shared meanings of security issues within communities, and that have a significant influence on security preferences, priorities and policies (Graham, 2014:1). Strategic culture refers to patterns of thought and action in relation to force produced by national historical experience (Gray, 1986:36).

Scholars like McDonough (2011:28) question the utility of the concept and suggest a decoupling of strategic culture from behavior, to make the concept causally robust. However, it remains a relevant context for framing strategic decision-making beyond just establishing causality of strategic behavior (Gray, 1999:49). Others like Johnston (1995), Katzenstein (1996) and Rosen (1995) have all suggested that strategic culture can be used to explain national security policy. Again, Wendt (1992), Johnston (1995) and Desch (1999) also agree that national security policy is related to culture. Similar concepts, like political culture, have

been used to explain behavior as Almond and Verba (1963) opine. In this regard, peculiar national practices that have evolved from historical experiences could explain the behavior of states and distinguish strategy making in countries (Gray, 1986). For this reason Lantis (2002:94) agrees that strategic culture provides the context within which strategy is debated, while serving as a self-supporting determinant of strategic policy patterns. However as Howlett (2005:10) rightly observes, it is problematic to assume that only rational and unitary actors should be taken into consideration in developing security policy given the role of non-state actors such as warlords, terrorists or rivals in contemporary civil wars. While many scholars have focused on observing the cases of countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America, very few studies, like Francis (2004), have attempted to understand Nigeria's strategic behavior by examining its strategic culture. It is this gap that this paper attempts to fill.

National security policy is one of the manifestations of strategic behavior. Wolfers (1952:481) succinctly observe that national security mean different things to different people. It refers to the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty of a state; as well as its core political and cultural values against military threats from without and disruptive elements from within (Chandra and Bhonsie, 2015: 337). It could be a single document or a collection of documents that form an integrated policy. It could be called a plan, a strategy or a concept (Jatau, 2017:7). Governments across the world have to take various measures to enhance national security and insulate themselves from threats and attacks (Bello, 2014:56). It is against this background that we examine Nigeria's national security policy as a reflection of its strategic preferences, shaped by its history, and its global, regional and national environment.

## **2.0 Methodology**

This paper presents a descriptive analysis of the literature debates on strategic culture and its relationship with national security policy. It explores this subject using the Strategic Culture theory of Collin Gray, to demonstrate that Nigeria's strategic behavior nationally and within the region, has been a product of its strategic culture. To understand Nigeria's strategic culture here we present an overview of three main issues: its security conditions and concerns, its threat perception and its policy behavior and responses to these threats. A descriptive overview of Nigeria's security policy is presented for empirical analysis. We rely mainly on secondary sources for data, particularly journals, books, government reports and related databases like SIPRI for data on military spending, and the Library of Congress Country Studies (2010) for data on the defining characteristics of Nigeria's security policy.

## **3.0 Theoretical Framework for Analysis**

The theory of strategic culture assumes that cultural variables influence the ideational bridge (Gray, 2010:167). The ideational bridge goes beyond an actor's political and military institutions to influences strategic decision-making at both levels (Horton-Eddison, 2017:3). Strategic culture takes account of actors' unique political, geopolitical, historical and economic contexts (Gray, 1981:22). Strategic determinations evolve in relation to domestic factors as opposed to the externality of structural realism thus providing the basis of understanding the 'why' and 'how' of strategic decision-making (Horton-Eddison, 2017:4). Johnston (1995) acknowledges that the concept is still highly contested and remarkably indeterminate, but Gray (1999), Snyder (1997) and Howlett (2006) agree that the idea of the concept encompasses patterns of habitual behavior as derived from common experiences and accepted narratives. As such behavior informs strategic culture and strategic culture informs strategic behavior (Horton-Eddison, 2017:4), strategic culture forms and provides the context for understanding behavior (Gray, 1999:49). Although the theory has been criticized for its

static outlook, it remains a useful framework of analysis for the study of security policy of states, and particularly for this paper.

#### **4.0 Nigeria's Strategic Culture and its National Security Policy: A Descriptive Overview**

Nigeria's strategic culture can be understood when we examine three basic aspects: the security conditions and concerns of the state, its threat perception and its behavior in terms of its response to the security challenges it is confronted with. This section presents a descriptive overview of these issues.

##### **4.1.1 Security Conditions and Concerns**

Nigeria's security conditions and concerns could be grouped into three separate but related categories: local and bilateral, African and Regional, and Global (Ogedebe and Jacob, 2012:124). Nigeria's local and bilateral concerns include, but are not limited to the following: border security, illegal migration and smuggling, bilateral military cooperation, continental and extra continental threats (Library of Congress Country Studies, 2010).

Border security, particularly in an era of globalization which requires more open borders with limited barriers, has been one of the major concerns of the Nigerian state (Akinyemi, 2013:1). Some of the border security challenges come from illegal migration and smuggling of illegal goods, proliferation of small arms, light weapons and nuclear products, human trafficking of women and children, money laundering, drug trafficking and wide spread fraud/theft (Akinyemi, 2013:6).

In response to many of these challenges, Nigeria has had to enter into bilateral military cooperation with states within and outside the region. However as Omede (2006:7) rightly observes, some of these cooperation is aimed at dealing with infringements that Nigeria perceives as threats to its national security. Nigeria's policy towards her neighbors, since independence, has been guided by four main principles: the sovereign equality of all African States; respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of every African state; non-interference in the internal affairs of other African countries; and commitment to functional cooperation as a means of promoting African Unity (Ogpu, 1967). While it is the case that Nigeria respects the sovereignty and integrity of its neighbors, and tends to deal softly with cases of aggression, one must lose sight of the fact that being largely francophone countries and any overtly aggressive policy, on any of them, could risk a military response from France (Omede, 2006:7).

Nigeria was a major supporter of South Africa in the struggle to end apartheid. Nigeria-South Africa relations have been a tale of cooperation and conflict (Chibuzor et al, 2017: 67). In the past Nigeria had a no-tolerance policy towards apartheid in South Africa and made positive contributions to the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. However, in recent years the renewed, pervasive and reoccurring nature of Xenophobia in South Africa impinges on the ethos of African renaissance as Chibuzor et al (2017:61) rightly observe, and is perceived as a form of aggression by the Nigerian State. These Xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in particular, have cast a dark cloud on the historic friendship of these two countries. Some like Seteolu and Okuneye (2017:57) argue that conflict and competition between these two countries is a result of the pursuit for regional hegemonic status.

Another security concern is the area of Nigeria-Arab relations. Nigeria-Arab ties began on a high note with strong political, economic and cultural bonds in the first republic through to the 1960's and 70's (Paden, 1986). As Paden (1986:80) succinctly observes, one

critical issue that dominated Nigeria –Arab relations was the constitutional contention over the extent to which the regional governments in Nigeria could pursue their own ties with Arabs or Israeli's. This polarized the country into the pro- Israeli eastern and western regions versus the pro- Arab North. In recent times, Nigeria-Arab relations here have been hugely impacted by events in the Middle East such as the Arab Spring. There is a major concern that terrorists displaced from Yemen, Bahrain and even Libya, and with funding from countries like Libya, Iran and Syria could take advantage of Nigeria's porous borders with the Sahel to infiltrate and enhance the capacity of disaffected groups within the country (Osakwe, 2014:27). The recent surge in Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers conflicts in many states in Northern and Midwestern Nigeria tend to reflect this infiltration.

In terms of global interests, since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has been confronted with several internal security challenges (Dambazu, 2014). In terms of internal security concerns, Nigeria has had to contend with terrorism, insurgency, border crimes, ethnic conflicts, and the grievances of militant groups across the country (Dambazu, 2014). The Nigerian armed forces have been very involved in efforts to restore security to various parts of the country. In terms of its civil-military relations, there is a huge gap between the military and the civilian populace, as a result of years of brutality endured during military regimes. There have been several efforts aimed at reducing this gap and improving civil-military relations as well as developing constructive engagements on key security issues to improve internal security. Nigeria continues to contribute to UN peacekeeping missions, and being a party to several treaties, takes part in multilateral missions around the world.

#### **4.1.2 Threat Perception**

Threat perception refers to the process by which policy makers come to know and understand the threats posed to their state by external (*or internal*) actors based on their assessment of a rival actors capabilities and intentions; threat perception is influential in determining whether or not to use military force (Perez, 2016:31). Beyond material capabilities, the level of compatibility of state preferences between two countries and the historical predisposition that states have towards each other are both significant factors and key to understanding what each will perceive as threatening behavior (Walt, 1987:17).

The civilian government that came on board in 1999 recognized the need to redirect Nigeria's foreign policy and one of its earliest strategies was to aggressively search for friends among countries responsible for influencing global affairs and shaping international economic diplomacy, given that its ability to play both a regional and continental role was largely dependent on its relationship with these global powers (Alao, 2011:5). Externally, given its "big brother" role in the region, Nigeria considers as threatening behavior any action that threatens the sovereign independence and territorial integrity of any African state and any action that appears to jeopardize African unity and independence. While it believes in non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, any action that threatens the well-being of Africans living in any African state is considered threatening behavior and will always be met with necessary response Nigeria also perceives as threatening behavior any action that tends to impede regional cooperation and development, or actions that hinder security cooperation.

The extent to which the state perceives these as threats determines the extent to which they will pull resources to address them. Misperception, however, can occur and lead states astray and this could be caused by deliberate deception, structure of the society/state, the international system, politics and even emotions of leaders and/or policy makers (Perez,

2016:31). A cursory look at the nature of internal security challenges in Nigeria from 1999 till date reveals that two main areas have been recurrent, radical Islam, natural resource conflicts, militancy and secession attempts. Nigeria as a state has been confronted with several threats to security. Ranging from Boko Haram in the North East to militancy in the Niger Delta region, over oil resources, Fulani Herdsmen/ Farmers conflicts in the north and middle Belt region, including parts of the South-East, and secession attempts to create the Biafra by IPOB and other groups in the South-East, the government has not had any breathing space. However, the response in all these cases has largely been the use of force (Williams, 2016:181-184). Clearly while the underlying causes of many, if not all, of these threats cannot be adequately tackled through the use of force, the Nigeria government characteristically, places more emphasis on military response and focuses very little resources to tackle the other factors of poverty, inequality, marginalization, unemployment and bad governance, all of which contribute directly and indirectly to the major military threats that get the attention of the state.

#### **4.1.3 National Security Policy**

Nigeria's national security policy since 1960, has been tied to the challenges of external aggression and addressing the problem of internal upheavals. The Nigerian Constitution rightly provides that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government (Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria, 1999, Section (14) 2). The role of the public policy process in matters of national security cannot be overemphasized because of the crucial role it plays in identifying problems, deciding on what measures to take in addressing those problems, assessing effectiveness, or otherwise, of the measures, as well as in monitoring and implementing these measures (Bello, 2014:56).

At the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the government of Former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999 – 2007) focused its national security policy on ensuring the safety of Nigerians, domestically and internationally as well as ensuring the protection of the sovereignty of the country (Teniola, 2016:3). President Obasanjo's security policy focused on bringing together the security interests of individuals, communities, ethnic nationalities, political groups and institutions in the country (Teniola, 2016:3).

In 2007, during the administration of Former President Umaru Musa Yar'adua (2007-2010), there was an attempt to bring foreign policy and domestic affairs together in a way that made the citizen the focus of foreign policy (Dickson, 2010:1). According to Mbachau (2007:9) the main force of this new foreign policy initiative was the concern for the basic needs, human rights and socio-economic welfare of Nigerians in bilateral and multilateral engagements.

In 2015, the government of Former President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015), having observed the absence of a Comprehensive National Security Policy and Strategy document for the country (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme [NSRP], 2015:2), launched a framework for a holistic and more coordinated approach and response to security concerns in the country called the National Security Strategy (NSS) (Jatau, 2017:11). The NSS identified major security issues and assigned roles and responsibilities to the government, civil society, private agencies and individuals in addressing these issues, including counterterrorism and cyber-security strategies (Jatau, 2017:11). The Jonathan administration acknowledged that the strategy demanded multi-sectoral, domestic and international approaches, efforts and cooperation for its success (Usman, 2015). However, the strategy was aimed primarily at combating terrorism, and is contained in three separate documents: the

National Security Strategy, Counter Terrorism Strategy and Cyber Security Plan and Strategy (Usman, 2015). The implication of this state-centric focus on terrorism was that the underlying factors that created the environment for terrorism itself were not given the relevant attention.

In May 2015, the government of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-till date) came on board, having inherited all the security challenges of previous administrations. In November 2017, the Buhari administration launched its own policy framework and national action plan to prevent and counter terrorism (Ogunmade and Olugbode, 2017). With the challenges of Boko Haram, Herdsmen/Farmers, Niger Delta militants and the secession calls for the state of Biafra, the Buhari administration has been neck deep and sometimes appears overwhelmed with looking for solutions to these challenges.

The response of these administrations to security challenges reveals a state-centric view, overdependence on military force and lack of interest in tackling human security challenges. The Niger Delta crisis has been one of the critical fault lines of Nigerian politics and the shedding of blood has been a recurrent part of the governments' domestic policy towards issues in the Niger Delta (Aghalino, 2009:57). In 1999, during the Obasanjo administration, over 2000 people were killed, many more wounded and properties damaged, in a vengeful action of the government in the Odi massacre (Aghalino, 2009:64). The actions of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were perceived, by the government as acts of terrorism and subversion and called for 'decisive military action' (Bassey, 2012:81). Also, the escalation of the Boko Haram threat is often traced to the brutal killing of members of the sect along with their leader, Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. The creation of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2004, to combat the threat of the group, further revealed the governments' view of the situation (Williams, 2016:182). These cases are an indication of the brutality and heavy handedness with which Nigerian leaders perceive and deal with legitimate political dissention (Aghalino, 2009:64). The government has a narrow view of security and has focused more on state security at the expense of human security as seen in the rise in defense spending over the years in tackling security issues. An exception to this state-centric behaviour was the 'citizen diplomacy' of the Yar'adua administration which was people oriented and could have been a stride in ensuring that national and international actions would be driven largely by the need to promote citizens welfare and security (Eze, 2009:8). However, this shift has not been sustained largely because it was not consistent with the strategic culture of the Nigerian state, as placing the citizen at the center of national policy, in practice, is alien to the Nigerian state (Dickson, 2010:6).

## **5.0 Conclusion**

From inception, Nigeria's strategic culture has reflected a state-centric view of threats that seem to result in the use and/or threat of use of force. The implication of this narrow conception of threats has been an overemphasis on military capability at the expense of the numerous non-military factors that tend to more directly affect national security. Challenges of globalization, terrorism, global health and climate change are clearly issues that require a more non-military response given their bearing on the lives and well-being of populations around the world. Nigeria's strategic culture has produced a 'force-centred' approach to counterterrorism, for instance, with negative implications for the citizens of the country. While so much human and material resources, is spent on defense, other sectors such as health, agriculture, housing and education have been neglected consistently and given a secondary place over the years. For instance, in terms of government spending on health, in

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2016, Nigeria ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> in Africa (Bhardwaj, 2016). Very recently the 2018 budget revealed a paltry 7% allocation for education (Tauna, 2017).

Nigeria's strategic culture does not reflect a concern with human security. Its focus has always been on regime and state security. Although the constitution and other policy documents make reference to the protection of people and the security of citizens, in practice the Nigerian state, through its leaders tends to frequently choose brutal force over the lives and property of its citizens. This is as a result of its emphasis on state security, which directly and indirectly, translates to regime security. The behavior of the state towards external aggression over the years has affected how internal security issues are dealt with. The implication has been a neglect of human security concerns internal to the country, and a focus on regional and international involvement for the achievement of national interests defined in terms of state security. Even when it is obvious that conflicts have a human security dimension, the government finds it difficult to shift its focus from state security dynamics to focus on thus human security concerns. Nigeria is currently the seventh largest spender in Africa and the largest military contributor in the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS] (Global Security, 2017).

Given the need to combat security challenges ranging from climate change and terrorism, to insurgency and militancy one can understand why spending on defense is rising. However, when we look at the real factors that trigger and sustain the conflicts, and that challenge the stability and security of the state we would find that they are largely in the human security domain. In terms of its internal fragility, the Nigerian state confronts issues of state formation, civil conflicts, calls for secession and restructuring, weak political institutions, issues of national identity and increased redundancy in socio-economic as well as infrastructural development. In terms of external vulnerability, it is still confronted with issues of international debt, overdependence on developed countries and loan servicing all of which have a direct impact on its economy. However, given its focus on defining its security threats largely in military terms, efforts, of the Nigerian state, targeted at state security far outweigh those targeted at human security.

The national security policy of a nation is much more than what a government chooses to do or not to do (Ebribake, 2011). A national security policy should offer an opportunity to apply the principle of good governance to the security segment, as well as other segments, and put into consideration the national interests and values, governance structures and decision-making processes that usually lead to the long-term vision of state and human security (Jatau, 2017:7). Although a national security policy provides a strategic framework for security oversight, coordination, alignment and guidance, it should reflect the views of the government and state institutions, as well as the citizens. It is to be aligned in such a way that scarce resources allocated to improving the national security are spent in a coordinated, realistic, cost effective and accountable manner (Jatau, 2017:7).

As long as the country continues to adopt a traditional way of thinking about national security, exclusively in terms of military threats, it will continue to create a false image of reality and ignore the non-military threats that tend to undermine the stability of states (Korany et al, 1993: xvii).

One of the main obstacles to peace and security in Africa, generally, is the predatory and exploitative relationship between security institutions of the state and the general population who are often victims of excessive force (Ebo, 2007:49). The absence of a

comprehensive security policy adversely affects the coordination and building of synergy among the security stakeholders in addressing current security challenges, like terrorism, in the country (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme [NSRP], 2015:2). A state's national security policy is a product of its strategic culture and for this reason a change in the direction and/or content of Nigeria's security policy will begin from a shift in its strategic culture.

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