

## Terrorism, Banditry and Separatism

### Is Nigeria at the Brink of Collapse?<sup>1</sup>

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#### Abstract:

This paper discusses the tripodal menace of terrorism, banditry and separatism as the centrifugal forces that threatened the existence of Nigerian State; and seeks to assuage the fear of morselization of Nigerian state by identifying six resiliencies that guard against the collapse of Nigeria. It concludes that the tripodal security challenges can be transformed into instruments for nation and state building. The paper therefore recommends the provision of homeland for nomadic Fulanis, an election of an Igbo President, as well as the restructuring of the polity as recommended in the 2014 National Conference Report. It also recommends the promotion of the Rule of Law, Justice, Equity and Fairness in the polity, especially in the handling of repentant terrorists and the rehabilitation of victims of these security challenges.

#### Keywords:

Terrorism; banditry; separatism; Nigerian State; resilience.

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## Introduction

Within the past two decades which coincides with the dawn of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has experienced severe political and social convulsion. These outbursts manifested in terrorism, banditry and separatism. Terrorism within this era in Nigeria is traced to the activities of Yusuf Mohammed whose Islamic Salafism in the North Eastern State of Borno, led to violent confrontation with the Nigerian state and the subsequent concretization of Boko Haram sect. The spread of the terrorist group to Yobe, Adamawa and other parts of the Lake Chad region generate destructive ripples across the country and indeed, West and Central Africa subregions. Banditry has its epicentre in Zamfara and has spread to other parts of the Northern region, such as Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger and Nasarawa. The continuous raiding and sacking of communities in these states as well as mass abduction/kidnapping for ransom have threatened ethno-religious harmony in the country in an unprecedented dimension. The social distrust between ethnic Fulanis and other ethnic groups in the North has increased due to the herdsmen clashes with and sacking of sedentary communities by bandits disguised as herdsmen. Thus the threat and perception of ethnic cleansing are common in southern Kaduna, Plateau, Taraba, and Benue states; and the indigenes of the affected states are taking up arms to defend themselves, in spite of opposition by the Federal Government against proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the country. Separatism has also emerged with violent outbursts in the Fourth Republic. The agitation for the actualization of the Biafran state was led by Ralph Nwazurike, however, the state burial accorded late Dim Emeka Ojukwu in 2011 doused the tension and temporary dampened the agitation by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The renewed separatism is led by Nnamdi Kanu, who founded the indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) earlier on in this decade. His violent verbal outburst and propaganda against the Nigerian state led to a series of sit-at-home protests in Igboland against the Nigerian state. He was arrested and tried in 2017, he however jumped bail granted by the Court and fled to the UK. His violent messages on Radio Biafra and subsequent attack of state's institutions in the Eastern part of the country by IPOB members and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) –the military wing of IPOB have led to numerous loss of life and destruction of Police stations, Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) offices, amongst others in the region. The incessant kidnapping, killing and abduction by suspected Fulani herdsmen in the South West Region prompted the formation of *Amotekun* as a regional security outfit for the people of the region. This was an indictment on the Federal Government over its inability to secure life and property of the people in the region. For similar reason one Sunday Igboho led the agitation for the Yoruba Nation as a separate state. The mass support enjoyed by Igboho's movement and its violent attacks on suspected and perceived criminals and enemies of Yoruba Race drew the attention of the Federal Government. Thus, Nigeria is dragged by centrifugal forces from many directions. The aggregation of these forces has raised many questions about the fortune of the Nigerian state, and is the basis for this study. The objective of the paper is to answer the question: Is Nigeria at the brink of collapse? It is divided into five parts: the introduction, literature review, methodology discussion of findings and conclusion.

## Literature Review

### Terrorism in Nigeria

Terrorism has been variously defined by scholars over time and space to mean the application of unconventional violent methods to harass and force state entities to negotiation or a making of an outright statement over issues of public concern. It involves unleashing violent attacks on chosen targets, resulting in loss of life and property. The objective may go beyond the destructive acts, but include the creation of fear and despair among the population of the affected areas (DHS 2019; USIP 2017). Terrorist tactics include: suicide bombing, mass spontaneous killings, abduction and beheading of victims, gunmen attacks on public places, and the bashing of cars and other fast moving machines such as aircraft into the targets. The attacks on the twin tower of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, raised global awareness on the sophistication of terrorist tactics in the new millennium and set the pace on the discourse of the dynamic nature of the menace (Basedau 2017; Cetin 23013; Ipe, Cockayne and Millar 2010).

Terrorism was a strange phenomenon in Nigeria until the dawn of the new millennium. Nigeria has historically experienced mass protest in the aftermaths of elections and census between 1960 and 2000, but the deployment of terrorist tactics as a protest was very rare. The Maitasine and other Islamic induced protest in the North were done without terrorism, but outright confrontation with the Nigerian state. The conventional methods of earlier violent protests made them easier to handle by the governments and the issues were resolved or managed momentarily. However, the end of the Cold War in a decade to the new millennium and the exponential spread of globalization accelerated by the revolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) change the dynamic of terrorism globally and Nigeria was not exempted from it. The clash of western and Islamic cultures which was hitherto checked by the imperatives of the Cold War emerged from its shadow, and this was exacerbated by Islamic revisionist in the Middle East who sought to reinvent Islamic Salafism across the world. The impact of these developments on Nigeria was enormous, since the country has the highest Muslim population in Africa. Indeed, every development in the Muslim World has reverberation effect on Nigeria. For instance, the 'satanic verses controversy' generated by Salman Rushdie's novel was also topical in Nigeria, as some Muslims called for the enforcement of the *fatwa*, issued by late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran. Similarly, there was mass protest in Northern Nigeria over the 'western coalition' invasion of Iraq in early 1990s and in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, as well as the similar invasion of Afghanistan as a counterterrorism strategy of the President George Bush administration in 2001 (Cornish 2010; Huntington 1993; Kose 2009; Rashid 2020).

Paradoxically, it was not a Muslim protest but the poor handling of agitation against oil pollution in the oil bearing Nigeria Delta that witnessed the deployment of terrorist tactics in



Nigeria. With the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 by the Nigerian State, agitation in the Niger Delta became more violent, and by the dawn of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria Delta militants took to terrorism and blew oil pipelines across the region. The kidnapping of foreign oil workers was daily decimal and military response was counterproductive. The destruction of the Odi community by the military as a reprisal attack against the militant further worsened the security in the area, as the militants, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Egbesu Boys of Africa, amongst others was resorted to guerrilla war against the state and oil installations. The perceived balance of terror between the belligerents and the negative impacts of their activities on Nigerian economy and Human rights credential led to a truce and the introduction of the Amnesty Program by President Yar' Adua Administration in 2009. The implementation of the amnesty program has been the basis for the relative peace in the region in recent years. It must be understood that terrorism in Nigeria Delta was home-grown and had the objective of drawing the Nigerian state into negotiation over perceived marginalization in the sharing of the oil revenue, as well as the harmful impacts of oil pollution on the livelihood of the people of the region. The manifestation of Islamist extremism and the radicalization of Nigerians emerged with the birth of Boko haram sect in Borno State around 2008. Mohammed Yusuf used to preach in the central mosque in Maiduguri and had a huge followership. He was said to be influential due to his radical message against public ills committed by the ruling class. However, the dynamics of Bornu politics in 2003 led former Governor Modu Sheriff to approach him for support in exchange for the implementation of Sharia legal system as introduced by former Governor Yerima in Zamfara state. Sheriff won the election with the support of Mohammed Yusuf, but refused to implement the Sharia legal system as promised (a narrative denied by Sheriff). Reneging on the agreement led to conflict between Sheriff and Mohammed, who publicly criticized and preached against the perceived corruption in governmental institutions in the state, late Buji Foyi – an ally of Yusuf left the Sheriff government where he was the Commissioner for Religious Affairs. Borno state government brought the Federal Government attention to the sect's activities which were seen as threat to state's security; by late July, 2009, a five day confrontation between the Nigerian state and Boko Haram sect broke out in Bauchi, Kano, Borno and Yobe states. The sect leader was killed in the process by security operatives, purportedly in police custody (Okon, Williams&Okeke 2021; Onuoha 2014). The leadership was passed to Abubakar Shekau, who led a Jihad against the Nigerian State. Between 2009 and 2021 more than 50,000 women have lost their husbands, thousands of women and children have been abducted, held captive, raped, forced into marriage with the sect's fighters and subjected to other forms of violence such as forced labour, physical and psychological torture (International Alert, 2019). The abduction of Chibok and Dapchi school girls in 2014 and 2017 celebrated the mass abduction tactics of the sect. These amongst others have led to the closure of schools in the affected Northern states. Indeed, the actual data of casualty of Boko Haram is unclear due to poor data collection and bureaucratic bottleneck associated with governmental institutions. The reported ascendancy of Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) over Boko Haram and the purported killing of the legendary Abubakar Shekau have opened up a vista of uncertainty

on the nature of terrorists operations in Nigeria. Although, the government is reporting of mass surrender of sect fighters with their families, in the North East, scores of attack on military and soft targets indicate that terrorism remains a threat to the national security of the country. Apart from the escalation of the Boko Haram menace, 2009 also marked the appearance of Nigeria on global terrorism watch list. The attempt by a 22 years Old Nigerian, Umar Abdulmutallab on board of Northwest Airlines Flight 253 to detonate plastic bomb during the flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Charismas Day of 2009, sent a chilling sensation across the globe. The event signalled the high level of radicalization of Nigerian youths. Indeed the car bombing of the United Nations building in Abuja and some other suicide bombings in Abuja were done by Nigerian Youths with considerable education and global exposure (U.S Government, 2011). Above all, at the height of Boko Haram activities, Abubakar Shekau declared the Islamic Caliphate over Borno and other parts of the North East, and indeed consistently rejected the sect's subordination to a secular Nigerian state (Economist, as cited in Paden 2015, p.4).

### ***Banditry in Nigeria***

Banditry involves violent raiding of settlements, caravans, and communities by armed men with the objective of stealing from, maiming and killing of victims and destruction of their belongings. It focuses on the use of force or threats to intimidate and perpetuate kidnapping, cattle rusting, village, and market raids, as well as robbing, raping and killing if individual or groups (Okoli&Okpaleke, 2014). Okoli and Ugwu (2019) attempt at typologies of banditry is very interesting. They classified banditry according to intent or motive, location, agency and autonomous, form and formation, and operational mode. Banditry type under intent or motive include social banditry which is intended to be a protest against social inequality and a call for a redistribution of wealth; and political and economic banditry is meant to serve such ends. Location banditry specifies where the banditry takes place and includes rural vs. urban, frontier vs. countryside, and maritime, coastal vs mainland. Agency and autonomy banditry is defined by how the principal / agency manifest; while mercenary banditry is executed by paid mercenaries who carry out the attack on behalf of their principal; autonomous banditry is conceived and executed by self-motivated individuals. Form and formation banditry identifies if the banditry involves a network of actors, highly coordinated, or it is a petty act done by individual or disorganized group(s), operational mode banditry refer to the nature of operations – either the bandits are mobile and roam around or they are sedentary and stationary at a particular location. All these typologies are manifestly visible in Nigeria. For instance, in terms of location, maritime and coastal banditry have been on an increase in the Gulf of Guinea which Nigeria shares with other West and Central African States. Rural and countryside banditry are the major typologies in the Northern Western states of Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi, Jigawa, and Kano. Besides, roving banditry has spread over the same Northwest in a highly organized manner; many of them are mercenaries, since they have recognized kingpins and commanders (ICG 2020; Okoli and Al Chukwuma 2014; Olaniyan and Yahaya 2016).



The causative and sustenance factors of banditry in Nigeria are numerous and self-complementary. They are rooted in the historical and socio-economic and political foundation of the Nigerian State. North Western Nigeria is part of the historical Trans-Saharan trade route which linked the forest belt of present day Nigeria to North Africa. This trade route was intermittently attacked by bandits. According to Jafaar (2018, p.2):

In those days, wayfarers and merchants traveling along our local economic roads usually faced the threats and damages of ambush from nondescript bandits. Armed bandits and criminals were known to be targeting goods ferried on the back of donkeys, camels and oxcarts. These bandits on our trade routes would forcefully take those goods and disappear into the bush. That is just one dimension of the problem then. In order instances the bandits would sometimes raid farming communities and villages with the intent of wilful killing and wanton destruction of property. During such raids, the bandits would destroy virtually everything in their path, including valuables, farm produce, etc. this subculture has been in existence even before the coming of colonialists to the territories of Northern Nigeria.

The seeming reality is that the subculture of banditry continued in low key and was stifled by the harsh law enforcement apparatus of the Northern Region and subsequent series of military rule which lasted till 1999. However, the return to Civil Rule in 1999 and the activities of the political class in terms of patronizing thugs for electoral purposes promoted impunity and weakened the state's security apparatuses. This encouraged some youths to re-invent banditry as a good business, since small arms and light weapons (SALW) used by thugs during elections are hardly accounted for. Besides, many bandits rely on their political godfathers for protection from lawful arrest and prosecution by the state (Agba, Coker and Agabo 2010; Moses and Ngoma 2017; Samuel 2020). Indeed, banditry is not new to region, but the volume, spread and sophistication in organization, as well as the calibre of the weaponry and resilience deployed by actors supersedes any era in history and therefore threatened the security of Nigerian State and wellbeing of Nigerians. These may not be unconnected with the impact of small arms proliferation traced to the fall of Muamar Gaddafi in Libya and the spread of criminal entrepreneurs in the Sahel region.

Another factor fuelling rural banditry in Nigeria is the high level of unemployment in the country. The youth unemployment in the country is a security liability because it provides foot soldiers for radicalization and other criminal activities, such as banditry. Besides, the Almajiri education system in the Northern Nigeria has spawned army of youths without basic life-skills and therefore take to street life and other violent crime as a vocation; and a punishment against the society which neglected them (Lawretta 2021; Mohammed 2015). Related here is the porous nature of colonial boundaries in Africa, where ethnic nationalities are divided into two or more states, the boundary between Nigeria and Niger Republic is blur as inhabitants of the borders crisscross the borders, so do criminal from both sides of the border. Moreso, there are huge swath of ungoverned space at the borders of Northern Nigeria, where state penetration is very low. These areas become safe haven for bandits and other criminals. They occupy these spaces as their bases and launch violent attacks on targeted areas

(Onwuzuruigbo 2021; Ojo 2020). Again the mammoth corruption in Nigeria has affected the state capacity to prudently utilize its resources in providing human security for its people. It has also weakened security institutions' capacity to nip banditry and other security challenges in the bud (Adegoke, 2021, p.19). Endemic corruption has increased the poverty rate in Nigeria, especially in the North, where desertification induced by climate change has led to poor harvest and crop failure. Funding of the real sector of the economy which would have generated multiplier effects in the economy is minimized by corrupt practices. The net implication is that, increase in poverty leads to increase in crime, including banditry in the North West of Nigeria (Adegbami and Uche 2016; Adagbabiri and Okolie 2018).

Worth mentioning is the political dimension of the banditry. Most of the bandits are nomadic Fulanis. Many of them do not have a distinctive homeland in the Nigerian state. Attempts at settling on the farmland of sedentary communities lead to clashes and reprisal attacks by the nomads. This is very common in the Benue, Plateau, Southern, Kaduna and Taraba. The political question of creating a homeland for the nomads has remained unanswered. Attempts at creating cattle colonies across the country by President Buhari's administration have been checked by component states in the federation, as many sedentary communities see it as a grand plan for land-grab and eventual Islamization of their domains, since those colonies are designed as permanent settlements for the nomads. Banditry therefore may be part of the protest and a means of putting pressure on the government to define a homeland for nomad Fulani in the country (Ojo 2020).

### *Separatism in Nigeria*

Separatism as a concept is grounded on the Atlantic Charter which became an integral part of the United Nations Charter in 1945. This concept is captured in the Principle of Self-determination – the right of a people to have their own government and a state to live in. Self-determination was a major concept of discourse during the two world wars. It sought to justify the reason for containing the expansionist aggressors and ensuring the freedom of nations from foreign rules. It was also bedrock of the campaign against colonialism and the eventual attainment of independence by Third World countries in the post-World War II era (Akinboye & Ottoh 2005; Chukwudi, Gberebie, Abasilim and Imhonopo 2019, p.630). Separatism, when conceived and peacefully implemented, leads to the birth of new nations, such as was done in Sudan which gave birth to South Sudan in 2011. Separatist agitation is not new in Nigeria. It has been part of political development in the country. This is due to the structure and process of Nigerian state formation, which is ridden with contradictions; and the failure of successive governments to resolve these contradictions (Suleiman and Agoha 2013; Sklar 1965; Okon, Williams and Okeke 2021). The first separatists agitation was led by Isaac Adaka Boro, who attempted to carve out the Niger Delta region from the Old Eastern Region in 1965 due to the activities of oil companies and the Regional government. This was followed by Colonel Emeka Ojukwu declaration of the state of Biafra over the same Eastern Region in 1967. The bitter Civil War was fought to contain the Igbo ambition of seceding from the Nigerian



state; and the post war years have also witnessed the agitation for Oduduwa state after the annulment of June, 12, 1993, believed to have been won by MKO, Abiola, a Yoruba man. However, the Fourth Republic has witnessed more separatist agitations than any era in the history of Nigeria. The Nigeria Delta insurgency between 2001-2010; Boko Haram declaration of Islamic state over Borno state and other parts of North East, the resurrection of Biafra agitation by Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereignty state of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Biafra Zion Movement, amongst others between 2003-2021; and the recent upsurge in the agitation for Yoruba Nation led by Mr. Sunday Igboho in 2021 (Chukwudi, Gberebie, Abasilim and Imhonopi 2019; Duruji 2012; Ikegbunam and Agudoso 2021). As noted earlier, the root of separatism in Nigeria is traced to the process of state creation by the British colonialists. The non-negotiated nature of relationship between the ethnic nations and the skewed structure of the state itself continue to breed fear of domination and marginalization. This fear was expressed by minority ethnic groups and it led to Willink's Commission and its report at the eve of independence. However, the euphoria of ending British rule by the political elites made them play down on its significance. In less than a decade of independence, the bubble of separation busted in violent manners, as the fear of internal colonialism emerged in many component units of the federation. The Niger Delta region consistently seek for separate state due to the lopsided sharing of the oil revenue derived from its domain and the poor response to oil pollution in the region by the twin conspirators: the Nigerian state and oil companies (Izuagie 2016; Ering, Bassey and Odike 2013). The Igbo of the South East based their quest for separation on perceived marginalization of the region by the central/federal government. The late 1960s' agitation was founded on the negligence of the central and Northern regional governments to check the genocide against the Igbos in the North after the July 1967 coups, the perceived tacit acquiescence of northerners informed the decision of Emeka Ojukwu to separate from the Federation and use the resources of the Eastern region (including the newly discovered oil revenue) to take care of the people of the region. The current separatist fervour is grounded on the perceived marginalization and exclusion from sensitive appointments by successive governments after the Civil War. Such exclusion is manifestly visible in every government except the tenure of President Jonathan (2011-2015). More importantly, Nigeria has not produced an Igbo Head of State or president in the aftermath of the Civil War, in spite of the general perception of its membership of the tripodal ethnic hegemony that make up the Nigerian state. This exclusion from the apex leadership of the country is the major reason for the current agitation led by Nnamdi Kanu and his cohorts. The agitation in the last ten years has enjoyed mass followership as a result of social media and the elusive Radio Biafra – reminiscent of the Civil War propaganda machine of the secessionists.

The Yoruba, secessionist fervor arose from the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections won by MKO Abiola. It lasted till 1999, when the Fourth Republic was inaugurated with Olusegun Obasanjo as the President. The current agitation is founded on the poor management of security in Yorubaland where bandits infested forests in the region and operated unrestrained. The activities of Miyeti Allah (a Pan-Fulani Cattle dealer) in defending the



activities of the bandits increase the suspicion that the banditry across Yorubaland was a conspiracy of the Fulanis to dominate and colonize the Yorubas. This assertion seems more credible when the Federal Government led by President Buhari (a Fulani) did very little to check the menace of the banditry in the region, as it is across the country.

The mass support of the agitation as illustrated by attendance to rallies in Ondo state and other parts of the Southwest demonstrates the desire of the current generation of the Yoruba people to pull out of the Union (Ajanlekoko 2021; Babatola 2020). The declaration of Islamic Caliphate by Abubakar Shekau marked the height of Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. This was orchestrated by the desire of terrorists group to establish an entity where its beliefs would be practice, without hindrance from the Nigerian state. The group took inspiration from the *Daesh* and hoped to replicate it in Nigeria with the support of similar entities from other parts of the globe. Although it did not enjoy the support of Northerners; it marked the first time that a northern group sought secession from the Nigerian state (Okon, Williams, and Okeke 2021; USIP 2017).

### ***Methodology***

Historical research design is the choice methodology for this study; since it objectively and systematically evaluates occurrences of the past, their impact on the present, and makes predictions on the future (Obasi 1999). The usefulness of this methodology to this study is embedded in its capacity to present and analyse resilient factors which sustained Nigeria's unity over centrifugal forces since October 1, 1960; as they could keep the country together, in spite of the tripod challenges. The study relies on secondary data, sourced from scholarly journals, textbooks, and the Internet amongst others. These data are qualitatively presented; and analysed with content analysis techniques.

### ***Is Nigeria at the Brink of Collapse? An Analysis***

The aggregation of the centrifugal forces highlighted in the proceeding sections suggest that Nigeria is at the brink of collapse under these forces. This section analyses the resilience factors in the Nigerian state that sustain it through periodic pressure; and asserts that the centrifugal forces are instruments of state and nation building if effectively managed by the government. This assertion is derived from the resilience of the structural and ethno-religious mix of Nigeria, the consensus of Nigerian elites on the unity of the country, socio-political re-engineering capacity of Nigerians, resilience of Nigerian security forces, the size and redistribution structure of Nigerian economy, and Nigeria's foreign relations.



## 1. The structure and ethno-religious mix of Nigeria

The resilience of the Nigerian state against the wears and tears of centrifugal forces over the years is rooted in the structure and ethno-religious mix of the country. There is nothing like a monolithic ethnic hegemon in the Nigerian state. The 'North' perceived as a giant structure has numerous ethnic groups apart from the Hausa/Fulani. The Kauri has a large population in the North East, as do Tiv, Idoma, Birom and others in the North Central. Indeed every geopolitical zone in the country is a federation of different ethnic groups with different aspirations and fears. Most of the component ethnic groups or nationalities believe that the overarching structure labelled as Nigeria, saves them from domination and colonization by their immediate neighbours. Besides, ethnic groups in Nigeria had enjoyed autonomous status before colonialism and as such detest every form of foreign rule. This was illustrated by the resistance of the Middle Belt elements and the Kanuris' against the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio, Benin Kingdom against the British and other similar resistance against foreign and imposed rules are rooted in the consciousness of freedom in the minds of the people, hence the preference for a form of commonwealth state which ensure the equality of component groups, and check the emergence of a ravaging neighbour(s) with the capacity to dominate (Ikime 1980; Dike 1956). Related is the religious mix. It is believed that Nigeria has a balanced population of Muslims and Christians. It is also common belief that the majority of Nigerians professing the Judeo-Christian and Arabic religions do pay homage to their traditional religion and culture during local festivals or ceremonies (Awolowo 1966). The import of this amongst others is that it became very difficult for a particular religion to dominate the psyche of the people of a particular region in a manner to generate collective action without discernment from others. For instance, there is a huge Muslim population in Borno state, but not all the Muslims in the state subscribed to Salafist Islam; some are Sunni-Muslims, while others are Christians and traditional religion worshippers. The resistance of other subsets of denominations and religions contributed to stifling the expansion of Boko Haram activities beyond certain parts of the North East and Nigeria in general. Similarly, enlightenment and religious tolerance in the Southwest prevent religious fundamentalism in Yorubaland and promote a cosmopolitan view of the Nigerian state in the region. These factors also play out in Niger-Delta where several ethnic nationalities are lumped together in a pool. Almost every community in the region has its own deity of worship for its people, but allows everyone to follow his or her conscience. The absence of monolithic religion and unchecked ethnic hegemony have resulted in a loose federation within communities and promote the consciousness of the inherent benefit associated with the maintenance of the Nigerian state, as it provides a relative check against internal colonialism and domination. In relation to Biafra separatism, the structure of the Nigerian state places Igboland in the South East heartland of Nigeria, and the separatist movements are laying claim to unrealistic and bogus boundaries of the proposed Biafran state. For instance, the inclusion of the Niger Delta states is faulty, since these states were the theatre of the Civil war of 1967 and have vowed never to be part of Biafra; the inclusion of parts of Benue and Kogi states in North Central are also problematic since these populations hardly share in the Biafran dream. If the boundary of the proposed

state is restricted to the five Igbo speaking states of Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi, Biafra would be a landlocked state. Such development may not occur well with most of the businessmen from the region, who are noted for import and export businesses. Besides; many prominent Igbos have their businesses and industries in other parts of the country with enormous benefits and advantages as citizens of the Nigerian state; losing citizenship status overnight as a result of regional session may place enormous burden on their businesses. This and other factors may account for poor support given to the Biafran agitators by Igbo socio-economic and political elites (Akinyetun 2018; Ezemeneka and Prouza 2016; Ibeanu, Orji and Iwuamadi 2016).

## **2. The consensus of Nigerian elites on a united country**

Elite theory attest to the inherent characters of elite in every society and these include the 3Cs – Coherence, Conspire, and Consciousness (Onah 2010). Nigerian politico-military and socio-economic elites exhibit these characteristics. More importantly, these are done at critical times in the country. For instance, Nigerian elites cooperate with one another irrespective of tribe or religion to salvage and keep the country together as one during the Civil War, some elite elements within the Igbo refused to support the Biafra project, while others from other region spoke against the evolving genocide in the conflict and were even imprisoned by the Federal Government (Achebe 2012; Okonta 2008). The objective analysis of issues by Nigerian elites were also instrumental to the resolution of Yoruba separatist fervour in 1990s through a compromised electoral process which ensured that candidates of the two leading political parties were from the South west. This was done to produce Yoruba president at all cost in order to assuage the Yoruba's over the annulment of June 12, 1993 election and the death of Chief MKO Abiola, the winner of the annulled election. Similarly, the adoption of the 'doctrine of necessity' to give Goodluck Jonathan the status of Acting President when late President Yar'Adua left for medical treatment, without constitutional transmission of power to his vice was a grand coherence and compromise to save the country from imminent chaos and collapse. Indeed successive political leadership in the country has held on to the indivisibility of the Nigerian state and emphasized 'unity in diversity'. Some have gone to the extreme of declaring that Nigeria's unity is non-negotiable. This rhetoric and the non-violent nature of the Nigerian elite, in terms of the readiness to become a warlord and sponsor insurgency against the state are part of the factors that keep the country together in spite of the tears. These were illustrated in the June 12 crisis, when elites across board directed their energy towards negotiation and peaceful resolution of the impasse, instead of importing arms and training foot-soldiers for violent confrontation with the state (Enemuo 1999; Yagboyaju 2015). Above all, the consensus of Nigerian elites has been demonstrated in the designation and proscription of three of the centrifugal entities in recent times, namely, the Boko Haram and its terrorist affiliates, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the bandits terrorizing the North West and elsewhere in the country. The consistency in the proscription of centrifugal and violent groups in the country has helped the state to invent



solutions to their menace. It is meant to deter potential recruits from joining these groups (Addeh 2021; Alumona, Azoma and Iloh 2019; Onuha 2014).

### **3. Socio-political engineering capacity of Nigeria**

Nigeria's political history has records of numerous impasses, but creative socio-political engineering has been instrumental to their solutions. The creation of twelve states by General Gowon during the Civil War broke the monolith North, West and Eastern Regions. This reduced the capacity of the tripod regions to generate consensus antithetical to the unity of the country. The new states mobilized themselves to break the shackle of servitude, imposed by regional arrangement. This was evidenced in the defunct Eastern Region, where the creation of Rivers and South Eastern States amongst others, weakened Biafra's grip on the region (Ota, Ecoma, and Wambu 2020; Onimisi 2014; Terzungwe 2012). Similarly, the division of the country into six geo-political zones has aggregated the affected zones, and enhanced integration within the zones, it has also promoted brotherhood in a manner that issues that would have left for individual states to handle and attract geopolitical attention. For instance, the Boko Haram menace has its root in Borno / Yobe States, but the entire North East zone are working hard with the Federal Government to resolve it; every state in the North West are working assiduously on resolving the bandit crises; the southwest have established *Amotekun* to compliment the police in the region; and the South-South or Niger Delta is the process of establishing similar security outfit. The socio-political engineering of aggregation and disaggregation of groups and regions have facilitated relative stability of the polity (Alumona, Azom, and Iloh 2019; Drama, Sani and Kankara 2016; Wayne 2013). Another instance worth mentioning is the conventional rotation of presidency between the North and the South of the country; this is also replicated at state level, where the governorship position is deliberately rotated between the three senatorial districts. Such ingenuity has brought stability to local politics and has made candidates from minority to lever on party zoning arrangement to become governors and other elected positions. This has assuaged the fear of domination and gives a sense of belonging to minorities within minorities in the country. Moreso, the insistence on Christian/Muslim tickets for executive positions at federal level and those states with considerable mix of the two religions have reduced religious tension in the country, as mosques and churches are built in some government houses for worship. (Akinola 1996; Eborika 2016). Thus, Nigerians have the capacity to invent the needed socio-political re-engineering to keep the country together in spite of the current security challenges generated by terrorism, banditry and separatism.

### **4. The resilience of Nigerian Security Forces**

The Nigerian security force is one of the central institutions that keep Nigeria as a united entity. The engagements of the armed forces in Nigerian politics started with the first military coup in January 1966. The armed forces eventually bore the burden of fighting the Civil War and running the state. It has been credited with a lot of structural reforms of the Nigerian state, as well as blame for some institutional decay in the history of the country (Ota, Ecoma,

and Wambu 2020; Etebom 2021). However, the security forces have helped the country to repel the centrifugal forces. Sacrifices are made daily in the fight against terrorism in the North East. The result is evidenced as the terrorists' territorial expansion has been contained. Moreso repentant terrorists are reportedly surrendering to the Nigerian state. Similarly, the greatest obstacle to the operations of the bandits in the North West is the security forces. Different operations with code names are ongoing in the region. The synergized kinetic operations between the air and ground forces are paying off, as illustrated by intermittent rescue of those kidnapped and the liquidation of the bandits. Moreso, interagency sharing of intelligence by these services have led to several arrests of non-combatant accomplices to the tripod threats. Notably, 'Operation Python Dance in the South East was instrumental to the quelling of IPOB divisive activities and the arrest of Nnamdi Kanu in 2017. Joint operations by the security forces accounted for the success of Anambra State Governorship Elections in November, 2021 when the IPOB threatened to stop it and delegitimized Nigerian State sovereignty over the region. State security also raided Sunday Igboho's house in Ibadan and declared him wanted. These measures have momentarily doused the agitation for the Yoruba Nations. Those feats are commendable, in spite of perceived failures by citizens. Nevertheless, fighting guerrilla war in challenging terrains such as Nigeria, where myriad of creeks in the swampy Niger Delta, hills and caves in the North East, opened savannah in the North West, tropical rainforest in the South East, and urban warfare in parts of the South West may be very demanding even to best security force in the world. The U.S led counterterrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Middle East in general is instructive. Besides, U.S experience in Vietnam also proves that asymmetric warfare in a challenging terrain is not a tea party (CRS 2021; USIP 2017; Simko2019). Above all, succeeding in security operations in a political terrain, deeply divided along primordial lines is challenging, and could only be done with a lot of resilience.

## **5. The resilience of Nigeria economy**

Nigeria is said to be the biggest economy in Africa with a gross Domestic product (GDP) of 432.3 billion USD, GDP per capita of 2,097.09 USD, Gross national Income (GNI) 1.103 trillion PPP USD and GNI per capita of 5,000 PPP USD (World Bank, 2020). The size of the economy grounded on oil resources has led to fluctuation of the country's economic performance over the years, but it has been providing funding to critical sector of the national life which facilitates the provision of infrastructural facilities and other public goods. Economy indices of the country is responsible for funding of security forces and the purchase of the military platforms and air assets deployed against the tripod centrifugal forces focused in this study; it has also facilitated the funding of the rehabilitation and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country, as well as repentant militants and terrorists (Aderonke 2015; Ikwuyatum2016; Ladan-Baki 2016). Furthermore, the redistribution of resources in the Nigerian state has ensured that Northern States get fair share from the national pool, in spite of their minimal contributions to the pool (Akeem 2011; Onuigbo and Okechukwu 2015). The net effect of the redistribution framework is that poverty and underdevelopment in the North

is checked, otherwise, the whole North could have been at par with Niger Republic and other landlocked states of the Sahel in terms of poverty and other development indices. By reducing poverty and underdevelopment through the fair redistribution of national resources, the system has creatively reduced poverty and other negative indices that promote conflicts and instability in the North and in extension, the entire country. Indeed, the strength of the Nigerian economy and its dynamics has helped and would continue to support the stability of the state if effectively managed by the operators.

## **6. The resilience of Nigerian foreign relations**

Although Nigeria is a created product of colonial impunity. It has over the years defined its foreign policies and relations with the rest of the world in a positive and creative manner. The concentric of its foreign policy has enhanced its relationship with others. The first concentric circle is its neighbours. A friendly relationship with its francophone neighbours and its construction of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have helped in relative security of its borders and subregion. Accepting the International Court of Justice's verdict on the disputed Bakassi Peninsula has assuaged the fear of domination, hitherto nursed by its smaller neighbours (Ali 2020; Okon 2020). Nigeria's activities on the continent of Africa have engendered peace and security, especially the crafting of the continent as the centrepiece of its foreign policy. These commitments have endeared Nigeria to actors on the continent (Stremlau 1981; Landsberg 2012). Besides, its non-align rhetoric during the Cold War and beyond increasingly make it accessible to all the divides of global politics. These and other factors, such as the respect for conventional international laws and upholding of democratic values have also increased its legitimacy and acceptance within the global system, as a responsible actor (Imam and Nuru 2018; Ali 2012; Stremlau 1981). The net impact of these foreign policy strategies is the relative support and goodwill it enjoys from the global community. Besides, many countries in Africa and beyond are interested in supporting Nigeria to overcome its current security challenges. This is demonstrated by the establishment of a Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) by member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to fight the Boko Haram insurgency. Besides, western powers have been instrumental to successive Security Sector Reforms (SSR) in Nigeria, as well as sales of military hardware and platforms to the security forces in the country. Nigeria also sources and procures military assets from Russia, China and across the globe. Moreover, Nigeria's prosperity is derived from its volume of international trade with the rest of the world. Thus, functional and stable foreign relationship is one of the resiliencies that sustain Nigeria and could remain so, since many actors believe in the survival of Nigeria as key to stability in the West African sub-region and the continent at large (Ani and Mahmood 2018; Atelhe, Anyambe and Abumiye 2016; Okon and Ojatorotu 2019).

## Conclusion

The paper highlighted the tripodal menace of terrorism, banditry and separatism in Nigeria and sought to assuage the fear that these security challenges were signs of the collapse of the country. The optimism is based on six resilience features of the Nigerian states, namely: the structural and ethno-religious mix of Nigeria, the consensus of Nigerian elite to preserve the unity of country, socio-political re-engineering capacity of Nigerians, the resilience of Nigerian security forces, the size and redistribution pattern of Nigerian economy and the resilience of Nigeria's foreign relations. These resiliencies show that the Nigerian state has all it takes to overcome the challenges of state and nation building as played out by the tripodal menace. However, it is important for the state to devolve its powers from the centre to the component units and restructure the polity in a way that would engender equity, justice and fairness, above and over rentier and 'kleptocracy'. An Igbo president should be produced as was done in the late 1990s for the Yorubas, since there are several democratic institutions to check the excesses of any sitting president in the country. The consensus reached in 2014 National Conference may be the reference point for socio-political and economic reengineering in the country. Efforts must also be made to resolve the homeland question for the Fulani nomads, as well as address the socio-political and economic variables which promote the centrifugal forces under discussion. State secularism and rule of law need to be promoted in a manner that enhances justice for the victims of terrorism, banditry and separatism.

## Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

## Notes on Contributor

Enoch Ndem Okon holds a PhD in International Relations and Strategic Studies, and a MSc in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Calabar and Lagos respectively in Nigeria. His research interest includes: African Regional Security and Governance, Peace and Conflict Studies, Terrorism and Counterterrorism, and Politics of Energy and Environmental Resources.

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