

Herdsmen Attacks and National Security Issues in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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Abstract: *The study focused on examining the incidence of herdsmen attacks and the National security issues in Nigeria and suggesting the way forward. Consequently, the paper posits that the cardinal objective of the Nigerian nation is to protect the lives and property of Nigerians irrespective of tribe, religion or political affiliation. The apparent failure of leadership in that regard, has led to escalating activities of the herdsmen in Nigeria over the years. Flowing from this, the paper extracts the Nigeria's National security efforts towards the present insecurity across Nigeria. To investigate this, the study made use of qualitative research method. Data for the study were collected through secondary sources. The study is anchored on human needs theory by Abraham Maslow. The paper raised a host of questions and also specifically examined issues relating to: why the growing trend in herdsmen attacks in Nigeria? What is the implication on the national security? Finally, the paper concluded and made some policy prescriptions.*

Keywords: Herdsmen, Security, National security.

INTRODUCTION

Maslow's hierarchy of needs postulates that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and sleep before moving on to other, more advanced needs. Thus, in a bid to fulfill the basic responsibility of providing for one's needs, man has sought and found himself ways of engaging in various forms of activities which include but not limited to cattle rearing. The Fulani herdsmen are nomadic people whose primary activity is raising livestock/cattle rearing. The crucial reason for the nomadic nature of the herdsmen is to reach areas with abundant grass and water for their cattle/livestock so as to maximize the availability of food resources in such areas. They are seen as people whose life, survival and tradition are embedded in the value attached to the herds, and the capacity they retain to protect their way of life (Abdulbarkindo & Alupson, 2017). In the 19 and 20th century, the Fulani herdsmen were largely located in the Sahel and semi-arid parts of West Africa but have today, moved further south into the savannah and tropical forest belt of West Africa. In African countries, the Fulani herdsmen are found in Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon. In these countries, they dominate the livestock business. Ndubuisi (2018) describes the Fulani herdsmen to be greater than any other group in Nigeria involved in the business of cattle rearing; they make cattle meat affordable and readily available at the door-post of Nigerians. This constitutes a significant component of the Nigerian economy as over 90% of the national livestock population is owned by them. This accounts for 3.2% of the Nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through the exportation of cattle products such as hide and skin, milk, cheese, minced meat, etc. (Eniola, Adeleke, & Okanlawon, 2016; Bello, 2013).

Despite their contributions to the Nigerian economy, their position in managing the herd and driving cattle on farmlands constitutes a major security challenge to peaceful co-existence between indigenous people and the cattle rearers/ herdsmen. This has been pointed as the main source of conflict especially between herders and farmers in a manner that has almost become an age-long rivalry. These conflicts breed violence and violence has continued to

threaten the life and security of Nigerians in and around the affected communities. It has equally affected the food security of the country as a whole. The larger number of clashes is dated from 2012 to the 2nd quarter of 2019 (Aliyu & Ikinma, 2018). Prior to that time, there existed a peaceful relationship among farmers and herdsmen across the states in Nigeria, except for a few cases of minor misunderstandings that did not claim any lives (Nzeh, 2015 & Doyin, 2017). The farmers accuse herdsmen of damaging their crops by failing to control their animals while the herdsmen claim that the farming communities steal their cattle (Adeleke, 2018).

Herdsmen Attacks and National Security Issues in Nigeria

Security has been central to the development of human societies. It is as important as life. Without it, humans will live in a perpetual state of fear, anger, anxiety, tension, etc. It is the quality or state of being secure such as freedom from danger, fear or anxiety. In the view of Thomas Hobbes, the provision of security of life and property is a fundamental function of the government. Thus, national security implies a nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values, and legitimate interests and enhance the well being of its people (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). National security must also include all measures designed to guard against all threats of danger and protect the citizenry and resources of individuals, groups, businesses, and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrences (Ogunleye et al). This explains why humans have sought means to safeguard themselves, their resources, and societal goals, against violent occurrences. In pre-colonial Nigerian societies, traditional institutions played a key role in ensuring the security of lives and properties (Abubakar, 2015). In contemporary societies, formal institutions such as the police are set up to guide against threats of danger. However, the roles of these institutions have been called to question judging from the rising rate of insecurity in Nigeria, as a result, Fulani herdsmen-farmer conflict. There seems to be, in agreement to Hobbes political theory, a relapse into the state of nature; when the fundamental responsibility of the government is not achieved, the people tend to revolt.

Public perception has it that the major challenge of national security in Nigeria today is the containment of diverse manifestations of violence spearheaded by various groups (Nweke & Nwachukwu, 2014). The fear of insecurity in Nigeria is on the increase and this has been compounded by the rising waves of terrorism (Ali, 2013). Ezeah & Osayi (2014) describes the herdsmen as a terrorist sect whose overt and covert activities has threatened the foundation of the country; its unity and has made Nigerians live their lives in fear. There have been debates to ascertain the status of the Fulani herdsmen as a terrorist group. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to have any meaningful discourse about Nigeria without relating to the security challenges the country is facing, one of which is the menace caused by herdsmen attacks. Gadzama (2018), asserts that a careful assessment of threats to national security reveals the activities of the armed herdsmen more than any other security challenge in the country at the moment constitutes, the most dangerous.

The Global Terrorism Index (2015) notes that Fulani herdsmen between 2010 and 2013 have reportedly murdered about 80 people in total. The number has however increased in recent times posing a major threat to peace and stability. In 2016 and 2017, they ranked Nigeria 3rd out of 130 in the list of countries with the highest impact of terrorism while naming the Fulani Herdsmen as the fourth deadliest terror group whose target is mainly the civilians with the intent to annihilate them and take over their land. The impact of these herdsmen attacks has been felt in almost all regions of the nation with regular killings of innocent people. These attacks have led to the loss of lives and properties arising from farmers-herdsmen clashes (Akorede, 2018 and Adeleke, 2018). The north-central states of Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and other states have experienced conflicts that led to thousands of deaths and displacements as a result of clashes between pastoralists (herders) and local farmers in several communities.

Attempts have been made by the government to address the herdsmen-farmer conflicts such as the deployment of the Armed Forces of Nigeria to violent prone areas to ameliorate the menace. For example, in Plateau State, north-central Nigeria, in 2001, the government deployed a Special Task Force to check insecurity resulting from the herdsmen-farmers clashes. Also, government at the state levels began enacting legislation prohibiting open grazing in their states. This, they hope, would reduce the risk of herdsmen destruction of farmlands and the associated conflicts. Benue, Ekiti and Taraba states are leading this opposition by enacting state laws prohibiting open grazing. States such as Ekiti and Taraba have signed Bills prohibiting open grazing in their states. This makes open grazing under any guise, an illegal activity punishable by law (Egbuta, 2018). Notwithstanding, the Fulani herdsmen attacks have continued to take an alarming dimension in all parts of the country.

Antecedents of herdsmen attacks in Nigeria

Date	Place of incident	casualties
January 1, 2013	Jukun Fulani clash in Taraba State	5 deaths
January 20, 2013	Farmers/Fulani clash in Nasarawa State	25 deaths
March 20, 2013	Clashes between Fulani and Tarok, Jos, Plateau State	18 deaths
March 29/30, 2013	Clashes between Fulani and Natives in Bokkos areas of Bokkos LGA Jos, Plateau State	About 18 deaths
March 9, 2014	the community of Angwan Sakwai in Kaura Local Government Area	Over 57 deaths
April 5, 2014	Galadima village	over 200 deaths
June 19, 2015	Port Harcourt	10 farmers were killed
July 17, 2015	Damaturu, Yobe State	50 persons were killed
February 18, 2016	Okokolo village in Agatu Local Govt. Area of Benue State	Five persons killed
March 5, 2016	Alla, Akwu, Adagbo, Okokolo, Odugbento, Ogbaulu, Egba and Obaganji communities in Agatu Local Govt.	About 500 deaths
November 14, 2016	Abam community of Arochukwu Local Government Area, Abia state	several people killed
November 17, 2016	Kukaki community of Shiroro Local Government Area, Niger state	6 deaths
April 12, 2017	Two villages in Gashaka Local Govt. Area of Taraba state	About 15 persons were killed
April 25, 2018	Seven villages in Nimbo in Uzo – Uwani Local Govt. Area of Enugu state	At least 40 persons killed
June 20, 2018	Ugondu, Turan, and Gabo- Nenzev in Logo LGA of Benue State	59 persons were killed
February 11, 2019	Kajaru LGA, Kaduna state	At least 141 people killed

Source: Aliyu, et al (2018), sahara news reports.

From the aforementioned, it is apparent that their mission is massive and the target is large. Herdsmen attacks have a lot of implications for Nigeria's national security. The activities of this group have not only made life insecure for all victims of its attack but the society in general. What makes the attacks by herdsmen very disturbing are, the frequency, as well as the level of destruction and sheer brutality (Gadzama, 2018).

Fulani herdsmen attack has resulted in population displacement and social dislocation which is evident in the proliferation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the country. Alagbe (2018) reports that From January 2015 to February 2017, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue, and Plateau states. In the absence of Internally Displaced Persons camps, most seek shelter in other poor, rural communities thereby depleting already scarce resources. Women, children, and men are dehumanized, hunger and poverty are deepened, business operations are halted, and many enterprises are outrightly shut down during the periods of violence. Farmers-herdsmen conflicts have further forced people to migrate from areas where there is a prevalence of insecurity to areas perceived to be relatively peaceful. In so doing, they not only create hostility between "indigenes" and "settlers" or compound the pressure on the infrastructure in the cities, but also stay unemployed. They then become susceptible tools for perpetuating violence and criminality (Audu, 2013).

In addition, herdsmen attacks make investments and businesses unattractive thus discouraging both local and foreign investors. Resources that would have been used to address other social and economic issues are channeled into ameliorating violence and insecurity thus increasing security spending by business organizations and governments.

Theoretical Explanations of the Farmers-Herders Conflict

Human needs theory by Abraham Maslow proposes a hierarchy of needs beginning with the physiological needs; air, water, sleep, food, clothing, shelter. Followed by the need for safety, love and belongingness, self-esteem, and finally, self-actualization. The central thesis of Maslow is that physiological needs (basic needs) must be met before moving on to the other needs. Thus, humans have basic needs they seek and need to fulfill.

The society is a gathering of people with diverse needs and interests with limited resources to meet their needs. To both a herder and a farmer, Land is considered the most important resource. A farmer needs a fertile ground to till, cultivate, and harvest enough food to meet his/family need. In the same way, a herder needs and loves it when the land is greener and pasturable. However, factors such as climate change, increased and constant urbanization, environmental degradation and demographic shifts deplete all available land. This increases the likelihood of farmers to move further afield for farming activities and the continuous movement of herdsmen in search of areas with greener pasture for their animals. Yet, Land is a limited, somewhat scarce resource with both artificial and natural access and usage barriers (Rashid, 2012). Consequently, the herdsmen are resisted from passing through the farmer's lands thus eventually leading to conflict.

The state of nature, or "the natural condition of mankind", was described by the English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. One of the key ideas of Hobbes is that it is in the natural condition of man to have autonomy of interest. Man has the right to do anything they consider necessary in order to guarantee their self-preservation and pursue their self-interest. Therefore, any disagreement/conflict of interest generates distrust, competition, and proves problematic. Thus, if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies and as a means to an end, subdue one another (Carvalho, 2017).

In the light of the above, there appears to be no consensus among herdsmen and farmers as they are both interested in the same thing - Land - which nevertheless, they cannot both enjoy at the same time. The competition for land between these user groups has been the bane of mankind since time immemorial. In order for the fittest to survive, the competition between these two agricultural land user groups has often times turned into serious overt and covert manifestations of hostilities, social friction, and social insecurity in many parts of Nigeria (Rashid, 2012).

The Way Forward

The conflict between farmers and herdsmen is pervasive in all regions of Nigeria. Its prevalence heralds grave consequences on national security and peaceful co-existence. It is therefore imperative that this issue is checked and controlled. On this note, the following strategies are recommended as a panacea to this phenomenon:

- Good governance is a way out for the issues of insecurity. When the fundamental responsibilities of the government are not achieved, the people tend to revolt. The government must, therefore, consider the security of lives and properties of its citizens as its main priority.
- Victims of these clashes should be adequately compensated and killings investigated while its perpetrators are brought to the book.
- Most people never feel secure when they are worried that they will lose their job, lose their money, their health, land, etc especially when these things are the means of meeting their basic need. It is therefore imperative that the Governments at all levels should ensure that rising poverty indices are reversed and employment opportunities made available to eligible Nigerians.
- Desperate times call for desperate measures. The government must brace up in pursuing a realistic social security program and systematically implement it to ensure that maximum security is achieved.
- Also, there is need to adopt and encourage community policing leveraging to work simultaneously with existing vigilante system in most states. Community policing will assist with intelligence gathering about security threats while civil police would respond to such threats. This measure will help deal with the

challenges of waiting for the federal government to act and deploy security services to states when there is conflict.

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