



POLITICS OF HERDSMEN ATTACK AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The menace of Fulani-Herdsman appears to have dire implications for political and socio-economic development of Nigeria. Unfortunately, the person who should be leading the search for solutions is now so totally distrusted by the majority of those involved in the conflicts. This study examines the politics of herdsmen attack and its socio-economic implication in Nigeria. The study adopted secondary source of data and was anchored on functionalism theory. The study observed the promotion of herdsmen's militancy for political advantage by the actions and inactions of desperate politicians. Based on the observations, the study recommends the need for the government to be just and fair in its handling of the crises. Also, government should through appropriate agencies probe the source of the sophisticated weapons at the disposal of herdsmen.

Keywords: herdsmen attack, implication, politics, socio-economic

1. Introduction

Nigeria is under a severe internal security threat, as the threat has political and socioeconomic dimensions. Each of these dimensions has critically affected the stability of the nation and can be traced to many factors in which the Fulani-herdsman appears to be major factor. Most worrisome in the present development is the pillaging, raping, killing and kidnapping by the so called Fulani herdsmen. Stories are found in the national dailies on daily basis of how these shepherds strategically attack several communities and houses, with sophisticated assault guns AK-47 (Ajibefun, 2018). In the

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words of Gadzama (2018), careful assessment of threats to national security reveal the activities of the armed herdsmen more than any other security challenge in the country at the moment constitutes, the most dangerous. In the last one year, the activities of the armed herdsmen have resulted in unimaginable destruction and displacement of many communities and loss of thousands of lives. The development as pointed out earlier has added to the humanitarian challenges in the country. Equally very disturbing is, the fact that, the activities of the herdsmen have without doubt aggravated the feeling of mutual suspicion between host communities and herdsmen.

Indeed, from Agatu in Benue State, Akure in Ondo State, Bukuru area in Plateau State, Oke Ogun area in Oyo State, Gassaka and Bali local government areas in Taraba State to Nimbo in Enugu State, rampaging herdsmen seem to be on a mission to draw blood. And blood they are getting. Everywhere they go, sorrow, tears and blood trail them. Curiously, they operate in such audacious fashion that makes mockery of our national security arrangement (Ogunbiyi, 2018).

Ironically, the herdsmen who before now peacefully coexisted with communities all over the country are now perceived to be enemies. Communities in the North and elsewhere never had serious disagreements with Fulani herdsmen in the past. It was a common practice to invite them to stay on the farms in communities after the harvest for purpose of enriching the farmlands. All these seem to have been lost due to the ongoing attacks. Also, seen in the context of peaceful coexistence the attacks by herdsmen are setting the stage for dangerous polarization of the country along ethno ethnic and religious divides. Compounding the rather fragile situation is, the utterances of some individuals threatening to declare herdsmen persona-non-grata in their states. Equally very dangerous is how some unscrupulous persons have continued to fuel very disruptive sentiments for cheap political goals (Gadzama, 2018).

In the light of the above, Okereke (2012) and Bello (2013) rightly observed that farmers can no longer farm peacefully because of Fulani herdsmen. These Fulani herdsmen and farmers clash have pitched Christians and Muslims against each other. Recent studies conducted by Okereke (2012) and Kasarachi (2016) have shown that, serious conflict erupt between Fulani herdsmen and farmers leading to loss of lives, valuable properties and destruction of vast expanse of arable agricultural farmlands thereby posing serious threat to food security since farmers for fear of attack could no longer go to farm and harvest their farm produce. The latest attacks by Fulani herdsmen is on the upsurge, with the most latest attacks in February 2018 happening in Benue State, Taraba State, Nassarawa State and fewer cases of attack in other states.

1.1 Conceptual Overview of Herdsmen Attack in Nigeria

Over the past year, Nigeria has seen an uptick in violent activities of nomadic Fulani herdsmen. In the words of Amaza (2016), the threat of a crisis has lingered with the effects of climate change rapid desertification of grazing land and lower rainfall making cattle rearing more difficult in the herdsmen's northern Nigeria base. Seeking alternatives, herdsmen have journeyed south seeking fertile grazing land for their cattle. But with that search often leading to farms in Nigeria's middle belt and south east,

increasingly violent conflicts between farmers and herdsmen have become a worrying occurrence.

Indeed, Kazeem (2017) observed that pastoral conflicts accounted for more deaths than Boko Haram last year. SBM Intelligence data covers incidents and casualty counts for Nigeria's biggest security challenges last year: the Boko Haram insurgency, pastoral conflicts involving Fulani herdsmen and cattle rustling as well as a resumption of militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta region.

Accordingly, Global Terrorism Index (2015) noted that Fulani herdsmen between 2010 and 2013 have reportedly murdered about 80 people in total, but by 2014 the number had increased to 1,229 people and they pose a major threat to peace and stability. Of late, the states of Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna and Katsina have been the worst hit, having suffered devastating attacks by the unrepentant Fulani herdsmen with a heavy toll on human lives and property. The herdsmen are usually armed with sophisticated weapons and usually employ surprise to attack their target communities at a time the communities are unprepared such as midnight or on Sundays when they are in church, killing people indiscriminately and burning houses and looting properties (Michael, Inyang & Ukpong).

Apparently, these increasingly deadly clashes have started taking place more frequently in the southern states. There have been attacks in states including [Rivers](#) and [Enugu](#), in the southeast, and Ondo, in the southwest, where a former presidential candidate, [Olu Falae was abducted](#) from his farm by herdsmen for days. So far, it is estimated Nigeria [loses about \\$14 billion annually](#) to these clashes. In February, [about 300 people were killed](#) and a [further 7,000 persons displaced](#) in four communities in just one local government area Agatu, in the middle belt state of Benue (Amaza, 2016). Also, following the rising spate of attacks, a number of, states including Ekiti, Benue and Taraba, passed anti-grazing laws as a measure to curb these pastoral clashes, but their suggested punitive measures have been largely ineffective, except in Ekiti, where the measures have at least seen attacks go to nearly zero. Nigerians have however condemned the Federal Government's parochial reaction to control the looming disaster.

1.2 The Politics of Herdsmen Attack

The country at the moment is facing myriads of challenges that have huge implications to its corporate existence. These challenges include, calls for restructuring the country and separatist threats to pull out of the union. In the words of Michael and Chinwokwu, (2016), herdsmen operating in Nigeria are mercenaries hired to kill, destroy and destabilized assumed enemy communities to pave way for political fortunes of the group of desperate politicians. The promotion of herdsmen's militancy for political advantage by desperate politicians was amplified. Politicians with no credibility, and who champion bad governance via corrupt practices often resort to the use of diverse militant groups for political advantage. In the same light, Michael, Inyang and Ukpong (2017) argued vehemently that herdsmen victimization has political undertone.

Unfortunately, the person who should be leading the search for solutions, "The President" is now so totally distrusted by the majority of those involved in the conflicts. The president has allowed himself to be boxed into a corner. He is now widely perceived as a strong and subjective advocate of the herdsmen such that the tough solutions that will be required to avert further economic losses cannot possibly come from him and be accepted by those who will be required to make sacrifices for peace to reign (Sobowale, 2018).

Consequently, despite pastoral conflicts being more deadly and represent a more pressing issue, the response of the Nigerian government has been anything but urgent. After a recent spate of attacks in Kaduna, a state in northern Nigeria, which left more than 200 people dead, Nigeria's president "Muhammadu Buhari" did not make a public statement on the matter until a week later. For its part, the Kaduna state government sought to solve the problem by paying off herdsmen, a tactic which has not worked (Kazeem, 2017).

Indeed, numerous reactions have trailed Nigerian President characteristic silence on the incessant killings by the Fulani herdsmen. Many Nigerians playing the ethnicity card, believe the president has failed to say anything because he, himself belongs to the Fulani ethnic group (Kazeem, 2017). Similarly, no country would overlook such acts of lawlessness by supposedly herdsmen or treat it with kid gloves considering the fragile nature of the country at the moment. As pointed out earlier, the government and specifically, the national security apparatus should do everything possible to neutralize the threat.

1.3 The Socio-economic Implication of Herdsmen Attack in Nigeria

The menace of Fulani-Herdsmen appears to have dire implications for socio-economic development in the states attacked and Nigeria in general. In the states where the Fulani herdsmen and farmers crisis is pervasive, the property destroyed and cases of rapes slog their economic and social opulence back by several steps. Besides the destroyed properties, socio-economic life in those states is usually grounded to a halt as people could not freely go about their farming and socio-economic activities for fear of being killed. The overall implication for sustainable development is that the farming, economic and social activities seem to be fast deteriorating. Also, a substantial part of the country's budget has been spent on the compensation of families who lost their relations to the Fulani herdsmen and farmers crisis. Also, huge amount of money is being spent on weapons and ammunition acquisition so as to equip the military to handle the situation on ground. All these seem to have affected Nigeria's economy (Ajibefun, 2018).

In a similarly light, Michael, Inyang and Ukpong (2017) observed that the attack has created social dislocation and continuous suspicion among Fulani and other ethnic groups within the areas of attack. Herdsmen are now looked upon as social stigma as people are no longer comfortable with herdsmen who are generally undertaking their legitimate nomadic business. The social integration and cohesion which often exist among herdsmen and residents has been battered as most communities no longer

socialize with herdsmen. They further observed that previously, Fulani herdsmen were allowed to join community associations and relate with members of the community. Currently, they are strongly denied the privilege of joining such associations where they exist. This inevitably has created social dislocation. In some communities, it has been resolved that no member shall provide land for herdsmen to graze their herds. This has greatly affected social relations (Michael, Inyang & Ukpong, 2017).

Consequently, an effect will also be that youths used to getting their sustenance through violence take a longer time to return to being productive, creating a situation where there are able bodied youths unable to work because they lack the core skills that would be normally incidental to their livelihood. Furthermore, as numerous farming communities have been displaced, unemployment which was already an issue has escalated along with declining food production (Afolabi, 2018). The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (2018) estimates that the number of food insecure people in Nigeria stood at about 11 million as at August 2017, with the number projected to increase in the short term. This scenario holds worrying implications on economic, social and security-related fronts.

Also, Afolabi (2018) noted that the economic impact of the strife is multi-faceted. First, the cattle industry is underperforming. It contributed 1.58 percent to Nigeria's GDP as at Q3 2017, as against crop production that contributed 22.19 per cent. Maybe, if farmers knew some of their produce could be traded with the herdsmen for acceptable payment, there would be the incentive to provide quality feeds to the herders' cattle, improving the meat and milk yields.

However, because violence, and not commerce is the means of exchange, the farmers are more incentivized to even poison crops they know the cattle will feed on, destroying value for both the farmers and the herders alike. According to the Nigerian Cattle Industry Report (2018), the Nigerian cattle market generates only US\$6.8 billion of a potential US\$20bn per year due to local strife and the inability of the government to fully recognize the industry. A second level of this is the fact that the violence decimates communities that would have been potential markets for the herders. Many communities in the affected regions have emptied out; creating a refugee situation that has increased the strain on government coffers.

Perhaps an even bigger threat is to Nigeria's food security. 25 per cent of Nigeria's population has been pegged by the Food and Agricultural Organization (2018) as severely insecure in their September 2017 report. Cattle is a source of beef and the security threatens the ability to get them to their markets in the south. Most of the communities in the Middle-Belt where the attacks have taken place are in the much vaunted 'food basket' of the country.

The Middle-Belt has traditionally been one of Nigeria's most agriculturally productive regions. Crops such as yam, cassava, rice, soy beans and guinea corn, amongst others which are grown in the rich soils hold the key to Nigeria's quest for self-sustainability in food production. It will therefore not be an exaggeration to note that the current pastoral conflict raging across key Middle-Belt states probably has more

economic implications to the country than the conflict in North Eastern Nigeria (Afolabi, 2018).

Many have not planted or harvested for as much as seven years since 2011 due to the ongoing violence. A lot of the produce from the north that goes to the densely populated south such as pepper, tomatoes and grains pass through this region as well. As more and more communities abandon farming and take up arms, the impact on supply of these foods and meat to the south will reflect even more on the price and food inflation will continue to rise.

1.4 Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this paper is functionalism theory. In the words of Egbegi, Ajah and Ogbonnaya (2018), functionalism views the society as a system and a set of interconnected parts which form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society, and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship to the whole. The earliest functionalists often drew analogy between society and an organism such as the human body. They argued that an understanding of any organ in the body, such as the heart or lungs, involves an understanding of its relationship to other organs and, in particular, its contribution towards the maintenance of the organism' (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). The functionalist perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of society by focusing on how each part influences and is influenced by other parts (Egbegi, Ajah & Ogbonnaya, 2018).

In this context, the Federal Governments parochial reaction to control the disaster posed by herdsmen crises has worsened the situation, thereby complicating our peculiar socio-economic and political situation. Perhaps that why Sobowale (2018), observed that Nigerian President is now widely perceived as a strong and subjective advocate of the herdsmen such that the tough solutions that will be required to avert further economic losses cannot possibly come from him and be accepted by those who will be required to make sacrifices for peace to reign. Indeed, if herdsmen crises had been effectively addressed the threat is capable of snowballing into a serious threat that could set the country ablaze by placing serious implications to the corporate existence of Nigeria.

2. Conclusion

Attacks by herdsmen without doubt have become the most potent threat to national security in the last couple of years. What makes the attacks by herdsmen very disturbing are, the frequency, the level of destruction and sheer brutality. The development in almost all cases is characterized by high casualty rate and massive displacement of communities. One can say with certainty that never has the country experienced this level of destruction and social dislocation. What however is so disturbing with the development is how the attacks in almost all cases took place under the eyes of security agencies. Consequently, the fallout naturally is huge humanitarian crisis in almost all the states affected. There is the belief that, decisive action must be

taken to ensure the wanton killings by the armed herdsmen are contained as the threat is capable of snowballing into a serious threat that could set the country ablaze. This is occasioned by the fact that, the threats have gone beyond the borders of the Northern states. It should be pointed out that, the dangers the activities of the armed herdsmen has serious implications to the corporate existence of the nation (Kazeem, 2017).

2.1 Recommendations

1. There is need for effective public enlightenment strategies through appropriate government channels. Strategic dissemination of information is needed because we live in a country where people thrive on taking rumour and half-truth as the truth.
2. Government should be just and fair in its handling of the crises.
3. Government should through appropriate agencies probe the source of the sophisticated weapons at the disposal of herdsmen.
4. Government and communities should ensure they regulate grazing activities of herdsmen within their area in the best security interest of the community members.
5. Government should ensure that victims of herdsmen attacks are adequately compensated.

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