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**POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN  
NIGERIA: CASE STUDY OF BUHARI PRESIDENCY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses political leadership and national security in the Nigerian APC led administration. The paper accentuates that the democratic process itself constitute a functional mechanism for interest articulation and aggregation thereby checking agent threat to national security that may arise from lack of input or participation in the political process. The paper through the use of leadership theoretical perspectives unfolds the practice of democratic governance in the Nigerian state as a characterization of poor political leadership which has propelled militancy as means of placing demands on the Nigerian political system by ethnic nationalities as a result of loss\* of confidence in the democratic process, it analyses the effort of Buhari's led administration towards strengthening national security. This scenario to a great extent has created heightened political tension in the allocation of state resources and as a matter of fact threatens both the present democratic experiment and the unity of the Nigeria state. Thus, the paper recommends for developmental federalism that is anchored on fiscal responsibility of component states as well as quality political leadership that is anchored on the people.*

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## Introduction

Democracy is a participatory governmental process, mechanism or arrangement designed to instill confidence in governance and thus checking against unorganized conflict as regards power acquisition and utilization processes. In other words, democratic government is designed in such a way that national integration could be enhanced through a built mechanism that enables the people to make input into the democratic process. This to a great extent explains why most undemocratic states such as the Former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Sudan to mention a few, could not stand the test of time.

In recognition of the importance of democracy as a mechanism for national integration and security quite a number of states, especially newly independent African states of the 20<sup>th</sup> century decided to embrace democratization in the 1990's either from military dictatorship to competitive party democracy or from one party civil rule to competitive party politics (Olagunju *et al.* 1993; Omodia, 2007). In the Nigerian scenario, the road to the present democratic experiment of the fourth republic which started in May 29 1999 was preceded by threat to the unity of the Nigerian state through: the political topsy-turvy associated with the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election, coups and counter coups as a result of the personal ambition of the main actors of the Nigerian military among others. (Ademoyega 1981; Oyedele 1994).

Coupled with the above are issues associated with federalism, the minority question; poverty, poor political leadership and political marginalization especially by people of the southern geo-political zones. Thus, in an attempt to solve these identified challenges ethnic nationalities reacted through the formation of ethnic militia in order to frustrate political governance so that their voice could be heard. Conversely, with the return to democratic governance in 1999, the people were very optimistic that the new democratic experiment was going to address the issues of fiscal federalism/resource control, poverty, poor political leadership, threat to statehood among others, based on the processes leading to the emergence of the republic. It would be recalled that the republic was given birth to base on the shared commitment of Nigerians to terminate military governance coupled with the fact that the Presidential Office was zoned to the South-West that was denied the seat in 1993 through annulment of the presidential election. However, the unfolding event of the Nigerian fourth republic has shown a situation where hope could be said to have been dashed by Nigerians as a result of disconnect majorly between political leadership and followership. This no doubt, may have further propelled the heightened activities of ethnic militia especially in the Nigerian South-South leading to Amnesty; and the present activities of the 'Boko Haram' in the North-East which is basically threatening the unity of the Nigerian state. From the above background therefore, the purpose of this paper is to unfold the hyphen and buckle between political leadership and national security with specific focus on the Nigerian state through the use of the historical method. To be able to achieve this, the paper in addition to the introduction is divided into: Literature review, the theoretical framework, political leadership and national security in Nigeria; the past scenario, the present, towards effective national security in Nigeria as well as the concluding remarks.

## Literature Review

There are conceptions of political leadership as a major and as an indispensable factor in ensuring political stability and thus national security (Blondel 1987; Wildavsky 1989). In Blondel (1987:15) own words: "... political leadership is broad and might be all encompassing: decisions that could be taken by the political leader might cover any subject". This is a vivid indication that political leaders by the nature of their office and functions are expected to take sensitive decisions including those bordering on national security that would aid national development. In order for political leadership to be effective in taking political decisions, Peele (2005) accentuates on the need for political leadership to be a function of trait and the ability to command cooperation

from the followers. When this is related to national security, it shows that political leaders especially within a nation-state should be able to possess the capability of propelling the people for national integration. In other words, confidence should be injected into followership in such a way that the people have confidence in the capability of the political system to synthesize diverse interests thereby curbing threats to national security. Thus, political leadership implies followership (Nye, 2008).

A leader therefore is a person who possesses the capability to change a course of events (Blondel 1987; Wildavsky 1989). This course of events involves understanding the expectations of followership in authoritatively allocating state resources, providing a free and fair atmosphere for the emergence of political leaders, national transformation through the utilization of ethnicity for national development rather than its use for undermining the unity of the state, among others. Consequently, political leadership that does not conform to the above stated factors especially in an emerging democracy like Nigeria could be classified as a failure. That is, such political leadership possesses weak character (House *et. al.*, 2004). The weak character to a great extent could be synonymous with the Nigerian State considering the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970, which was a major threat to national security (Omodia, 2006). This is coupled with the spate of ethno-religious crisis and political instability which characterized the Nigerian democratic experiments (Omodia, 2012). The above no doubt led to the manifestation of situational political leadership in Nigeria. This is because political instability and threat to national security by ethnic nationalities led to the emergence of leaders that were not fully prepared for the task of leadership. This perspective would be captured by the analysis of this research framework.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

There are three basic theoretical perspectives of understanding leadership: The Trait Theory, The Situational Theory and Fielder's Contingency Theory. The trait theory views leadership as a function of some idiosyncratic attributes such as self-confidence, cooperativeness, personal skills, adaptability among others (Koontz et al. 1980), which differentiate a leader from an ordinary person. The argument of the trait school is that leaders are born and therefore possesses innate capabilities. However, unfolding events and studies after the Second World War led to the emergence of the behavioural approach (Koontz et al 1980). This is in addition to the negation of the trait school based on its inability to observe uniform personality in leaders (Omodia, 2006). One may be attempted to ask that considering the fact that there are different classifications of leaders, if same traits are needed for leaders irrespective of classification? The above arguments against the trait theory no doubt led to the emergence of the situational theory of leadership. The conception of this theory is that leadership could best be understood based on the situation leading and determining the emergence of leaders. A typical example of this, in the Nigerian state is the anomic situation that led to the emergence of military regimes in the past as well as the situation that led to the emergence of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 as a result of the need to compensate the south-west for the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election (Omodia, 2012). Fielder's contingency theory on the other hand, stresses the utility of both trait and situational factors in enhancing leadership, that effective leadership is a function of trait or personality qualities, as well as the situation. This could be said to be synonymous with Plato's conception of the 'philosopher king' where political leadership is a function of innate qualities and their perfection through a functional leadership educational system (Sabine and Thorson 1973; Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2007; Omodia 2011). When these theories are related to the Nigerian political environment, the question that come to mind are (1) to what extent does trait or personal qualities play a role in political leadership in Nigeria? (2) Are Nigerian leaders actually prepared for the task of leadership or they simply emerge on situational basis? (3) How effective has political leadership been in Nigeria? The above questions no doubt will help in shaping the next sections of this paper.

## **POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

The history of the Nigeria state is one that indicated that poor political leadership constituted the greatest threat to its survival. Although such factors as institutional fragility, poverty, lack of credible elections, the nature and structure of the Nigerian state among others, constitute major challenge, the conception here is that these challenges would have been checked with focused leadership. Though, structurally there are some incompatibilities, there is no doubt that political leadership have adversely manipulated this to the disadvantage of the state and thereby impacting negatively on national security and cohesion by not emphasizing on things that bound us together but rather on things that divide the nation both in words and deeds. This was vividly captured by Omodia (2006:286). There have been provocative statements made by political leaders which have threatened the survival of the Nigerian state. Such provocative comments no doubt fueled the Nigerian civil war and had resulted into spate of ethno-religious crises in the country. As regard the Nigerian civil war, it would be recalled that it was a culmination of the manifestation of the pattern of political leadership that existed in Nigeria in the colonial days and during the first republic. Colonialism especially in its transformational period to political independence witnessed ethnicized party politics, mutual suspicion especially between the north and south of Nigeria, political thuggery and intolerance among others. The implication of which was the manifestation of such negative factors in the Nigerian body politic of the first republic. Hence, when the military took over political power in 1966, the coup was basically seen as a bloody coup that was targeted at the northern political leaders by the military elites from the south – eastern part of the country. This propelled a counter coup by the north and eventually led to the civil war in 1967 (Adigwe 1979; Ademoyega, 1981). The same scenario would have repeated itself in the aborted third republic, with the annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential election which was generally seen as free and fair. It would be recalled that the election which was purported to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) from the South-West in a contest against Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention (NRC) from the North, was annulled by the military administration of General Ibrahim Babagida from the North. However, the pattern of voting which shows that Chief M.K.O Abiola won in Kano the home state of Bashir Tofa and other part of the North (Omodia, 2010) aid in checking against the total ethnic division of the struggle for the actualization of the mandate by the Yoruba of the South-West. It must however be stated the Yorubas reacted with the formation of such bodies as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), an ethnic militia group known as Odua People's Congress (OPC), Radio Kudirat among others. It is also important to note that the activities of these organizations were antithetical to the survival of the Nigerian state as a result of unguarded commentaries and publications. The scenario persisted until May 1999, when Nigeria transited to a new republic.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**

Political leadership is one of the most widely experienced and *intuitively* or tacitly understood phenomena – like great power competition, Olympic rivalries, climate change, the right to develop, or central human rights controversies about trade-offs between security and civil and political rights (Masciulli, Molchanov, & Knight, nd). Most researchers on political leadership agree on certain elements that are necessary ingredients in the definition of political leadership. These element consist of: the personality and traits of a leader or leaders, including her or his ethical and cultural character; the traits and ethical-cultural character of the followers with whom the leader interacts; the societal or organizational context in which the leader–follower interaction occurs – general culture, political culture, political climate, norms, and institutions; the agenda of collective problems or tasks which confront the leaders and followers in particular historical situations (certain problems/challenges may elicit bonding between leaders and followers); the nature of the leader's interpretive judgment, (ability of the

leader to interpret a given situation and act in such a way that meets the expectation of the followers); the material as well as intangible means that the leaders use to attain their ends and/or their followers' goals; encompassing the technique that leaders adopt to gain the willing support of their followers (Peele, 2005) Political leadership overlaps significantly with the higher levels of military, legal, organizational, religious and ideological leadership, this is a special part of 'social leadership' in general, as we contended above. The latter includes parental, business, educational, scientific and technological, athletic, medical, cultural, artistic, religious, and other forms of leadership (Masciulli, Molchanov, & Knight, nd). This is an all encompassing conception of political leadership, which captures the political leadership class of our discourse, going far beyond the elected and appointed public office holders traditionally recognized as political leaders in our society. This becomes very relevant in our present context as members of the political class who do not belong to the ruling party at the national level, instead coming together to work with the federal government, prefer to politicize issues of national security, thereby negating the national interest on the altar of political expedience and forthcoming elections. Aransi (2009) brings forward the idea of differences between political leaders, in terms of their ability to perform according to expectations of the citizenry and the determining factors of such performance. Aransi (2009: 119) writes that "the difference between two political leaders in the same position today rests relatively little on differences in policy direction and very largely on other behaviour, which can be labeled leadership styles". In Nigeria, there are no clear cut differences in policy direction, as there are no specific programmes that can be linked exclusively to any particular political party. Elected officials at national and state levels as well as other political leaders adopt whatever leadership styles they believe would endear them to the citizenry. This is very apposite in the Nigerian context, as there are no differences in ideology amongst the registered political parties. This has encouraged the frequent carpet crossing from one party to the other, by politicians with intentions of contesting for public office.

## **NATIONAL SECURITY**

Nations of the world prioritize the safety of its territorial integrity, resource and its entire citizenry. This informs the belief that national security is the preservation of independence and sovereignty of a nation state. In reality, every country has a large number of interests to protect. These interests put together constitute the national interest which originates from values, good governance and protection of social and economic wellbeing of the entire citizenry. Based on this, one may describe national security as the protection and maintenance of national interest of a state or a nation. This corresponds with Harold brown's (US Secretary of defense from 1977 to 1981) perception when he defines national security as the ability to preserve the nations physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institutions, and governance from disruption from outside and to control its borders (Abolurin,2011, Adedoyin,2013), hence, national security has no universally accepted definition but there are two school of thought to it, the old school (traditional security paradigm) and the new school (contemporary perspective). The old school which is also referred to as realist school views national security from militarist angle with emphasis on military response and management of threats. Lippmann asserts that a nation is secured when it does not have to resort to war or threat of war to preserve its legitimate interest (Lippmann, 1944). Corroborating this view, Mamiruzzaman sees nation security as the protection and preservation of the minimum core values of any nation political independence and territorial integrity (Mamiruzzaman 1982). Orwa also defines national security as comprising the protection of the national interest, including national values, political and economic ways of life against internal threats and challenges (Orwa, 1984). In line with the above view, Mandel defines national security as the pursuit of psychological and physical safety which is largely the responsibility of the national governments, to prevent direct threats primarily from abroad endangering the survival of these regimes, their

citizenry or their ways of life (Ngbale, 2011). Examples of old school writers are Hans Morgenthau, Laswell, Walter Lippman and host of others.

The new school has moved national security beyond military realm to include non military factors. It maintains that old school conception of security cannot capture modern day security threads like hunger, unemployment, poverty, environment humiliation and so on. This informed McNamara when he cautions that; Any society that seeks to attain adequate military security against the background of acute scarcity of food, population explosion, low level of production, low per capital income, low technological development, inadequate and insufficient public utilities and chronic problem of unemployment has a false sense of security (Nwolise, 2008:350, Abolurin,2011:186) This showcases the significance of contemporary thinking about national security and this informed that of Nwolise when he postulates that:

*A country may have the best armed forces in terms of training and equipment, the most efficient police force, the most efficient custom men, the most active secret agents and best quality prisons, but yet be the most insecure nation in the world as a result of defense and security problems within bad governments, alienated and suffering masses, ignorance, hunger, unemployment or even activities of foreign residents or companies (Abolurin, 2011:184).*

Also, Obasanjo conceives national security as the aggregate of the security interest of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups and the political entity (Obasanjo, 1993:1-3). Also, Lynn and Miller describe it as the politics and policies governed by less narrow definition of security which is concerned not only with military threads but with other problems that threaten directly to degrade the quality of life of a national community (Ngbale, 2011:220). The Reviewed Draft National Defense Policy (RDNDP) conceptualizes national security as: All encompassing condition in which citizens can live in freedom, peace and safety; participate fully in the process of governance, enjoy the protection of fundamental human right; have access to resources and necessities of life and inhabit in environment which is conducive to their health and well-being (RDNDP, 2002:1).

To Professor Charles Maier of Harvard University, national security is the capacity to control those domestic and foreign conditions that the public opinion of a given society believe are necessary for it to enjoy its own self-determination or autonomy prosperity and well-being (Maier in Nwaogu, 2013). From the foregoing, national security can be seen as the totality of a nation's effort to protect and preserve the state, its institutions, lives and property. Indicts that the concept goes beyond the defence of the territory but also recognizes the various components and institutions of state that have much responsibility in ensuring security of a state since no country will allow itself to suffer internal or external risk. It is obvious that national security is not the sole responsibility of the armed forces alone but also the citizenry, Customs, Prison, Immigration, Police, Civil Defense and other private internal security organizations.

## **PRESENT SCENARIO**

Indeed, there is a raging debate among analysts, experts and commentators across the political spectrum as to whether President Muhammadu Buhari has so far delivered on his campaign promises to the Nigerian people, or whether he was yet to do so, halfway into the life of his administration. This is against the backdrop that President Buhari rode to power on the mantra of change. In fact, change was what he (Mr. President) promised Nigerians in the build-up to the 2015 general election. It should be emphasized that the country had prior to this time, been enmeshed in an unprecedented terrorist debacle that nearly overrun the entire North-East in particular and the country in general. Aside the issue of insecurity, the economic fortune of the nation has been bad and signs of possible collapse were imminent; owing to non-diversification of the economy and over-dependence on

crude oil as the major foreign exchange earner. Above all, a prolonged culture of corruption and impunity pervaded our national psyche. As a result, the country bagged an ignoble status of a “fantastically corrupt” nation in the international arena. There is no need to reiterate that the citizens were not spared either in this inglorious branding. They were constantly humiliated, disrespected and viewed with utmost suspicion in their dealing with other nationals, at different countries, airports and seaports respectively. To this end, President Buhari while trolling for votes from the electorate, promised to tackle the cankerworm of corruption, terrorism and the repositioning the nation’s economy through diversification and job creation with a view to taking the country out of the socio-economic and political quagmire that had hitherto threatened its corporate existence and pre-launch it in the committee of nations. While many are of the view that Mr. President should at least be commended for the appreciable progress he had made so far, especially in the areas of combating insecurity, anti-corruption as well as the resuscitation of the school feeding programme (which was only done in the 80s) among others. Others have simply discounted the argument with a wave of the hand, insisting that the expectations of Nigerians had largely remained unmet. In their views, the comatose economy is undeniably a sore point of the current administration. Be that as it may, it is important to observe that the assessment of President Buhari’s mid-term score card should not be based on political or sentimental narratives, in a bid to cause chaos and unleash psychological mayhem on unsuspecting public, but on the solid points of logic and reason. Therefore, a dispassionate look at the array of achievements recorded by the APC-led Federal Government, one may be persuaded to agree with the proponents of the Government that indeed, some measure of success have been made in the recent past. It can also be safely said that Boko Haram terrorism which was once a thorn in the flesh of the nation, threatening it to extinction, has been roundly and technically defeated. Communities which were ransacked by the terror groups became occupied territories of the terrorists; as they hoisted their flag as a show of dominance. Barely two years into the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, all the affected areas have been liberated by our gallant military. The Buhari administration is able to bring about high morale in the military. About a million people who fled the occupied but now liberated areas have since returned. They had begun the rebuilding of their socio-economic life and can now go about their lawful business without fear of being attacked. The defeat of the terrorists is evident in the reclaiming of camp zero in the Sambisa forest which for a long time served as a haven of the terrorists and their major stronghold from where they (terrorists) coordinated their activities and launched attacks. In fact, the recapturing of the camp zero had paid off, as it has provided a soft platform for the Government to dialogue and negotiate with these criminal elements from the position of strength and secured the eventual release of 103 Chibok school girls which were abducted from their hostels in 2014. Clearly, this is a demonstration that the terrorists are indeed, utterly decimated by the military. They do not hold any Nigeria’s territory. They can’t stage any spectacular attacks, as it was the case, and above all, they are now on the run.

Without fear of contradiction, the Buhari administration deserves a pat on the back. In addition, the APC-led government had during campaign promised to give N5, 000 monthly stipends to poor and vulnerable Nigerians. Some of the States that have so far benefited from this arrangement are: Borno, Kwara, Bauchi, Cross River, Niger, Kogi, Oyo, Ogun and Ekiti. Of the States, Borno, Kwara and Bauchi have started receiving the money while we are assured, the rest of the States in the first batch would commence the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) payment soon. “The nine pilot States were chosen because they have an existing Social Register that successfully identified the most vulnerable and poorest Nigerians through a tried and tested Community Based Targeting (CBT) method working with the World Bank. However, other States have already begun developing their social registers and would be included in subsequent phases of the CCT implementation. This would contribute in no small measure in youth empowerment and an enabling environment for youth to shun violence. Similarly, government has also started the implementation of the National Home-grown School Feeding Programme designed to feed 5.5 million children for 200 hundred school days in the first phase of the

programme. Although, the initial design was to feed pupils in 18 states, funding challenges had affected an earlier take-off. But the programme has now commenced in Osun, Kaduna and Anambra States. More States are expected to join soon. The school feeding programme has indeed increased school enrolment and improved the nutrition of school kids. There is no denying the fact that if the programme is properly implemented and sustained, it would go a long way in alleviating poverty among the masses. The statement which was signed by Mr. Laolu Akande, the spokesman of the Acting President, said, “Yemi Osinbajo recalled that the administration had also kicked-off the N-Power Programme where graduates numbering 200,000 were engaged and paid N30,000 per month, and the National Home-grown School Feeding Programme now running in three States. More so, the Buhari administration has kicked-off the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). “Under GEEP, soft loans ranging from N10,000 to N100,000 have been designed for artisans, traders, market women amongst others. Already, thousands of cooperatives, market women associations, farmers and enterprising youths have been identified and registered for the purpose on an ongoing basis, and disbursement of the soft loans through the Bank of Industry and have started since November 25, 2016”, the statement stated. Most importantly, the whistle-blowing policy of the Federal Government has also aided the anti-graft war in no small measure. The introduction of the whistle-blowing policy incentive has exposed corruption and theft in the public service. It has thus led to the recovery of some colossal amount of the nation’s looted wealth. This indeed is change in action. Another area the administration of President Buhari can be given the thumbs up is in food sufficiency and security. The rice production initiative of his administration has triple to 5 million metric tons per annum. The Government is determined to stop the importation of rice by 2019. Akin to this, is the synergy between Lagos and Kebbi States in rice production and it is worthy of emulation by other States of the federation. This will not only guarantee food security but also bring about foreign exchange earnings through agricultural export, thereby steering the country out of the mono cultural economy. Worthy of note is the implementation of Treasury Single Account (TSA) by the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. It cannot be controverted that the Treasury Single Account (TSA) has to a large extent blocked all expenditure leakages in the system, thus instilling some measure of financial probity and accountability in the management of public funds.

## **TOWARDS EFFECTIVE NATIONAL SECURITY**

The fact that the greatest threat to the national security of the Nigerian state is internal, is an indication of the level of poor integrative mechanism of the present democratic system, where ethnicity and regional sentiment is the driving force in this democratic dispensation. As a result, in order for national security to be entrenched in the Nigerian state through democratic governance there is need for: (1) the present Nigerian federal arrangement to be restructured in such a way that the focus would be on development through fiscal federalism where emphasis would be on what component states and individuals could contribute rather than what could be taken. In order words, the more you contribute the more you get in term of benefit. This no doubt would make more people to look inward and develop more through investment in areas of comparative advantage. In addition, the process would greatly mobilize the people for national development because without the people, resources would not be fully tapped; (2) Central to national security is the factor of instilling confidence in governance. This could be achieved when the electoral process is anchored on the people. That is, elections are not only free and fair but, opposition parties possess the confidence that if they can sell their programmes to the electorate and with effective organization they stand the chance of controlling the machinery of government. This process would not only allow for good governance and quality political leadership, but it will also create a belief system that conflict of interest, orientation and ideology could be functionally injected into the democratic system without necessarily snowballing into crisis. People will see reasons to avoid violence in all spheres of life.



## CONCLUSION

This research work has basically looked at the threat to national security in Nigeria from the perspective of poor political leadership caused by big shots of the last administration trying to frustrate the change agenda designed by Buhari led administration. From the analysis above, one could clearly say that there is a hyphen and buckle between threat to national security and poor political leadership. In other words, the paper established the fact that democracy is a form of government that enables for effective conflict resolution especially in a multi – ethnic state like Nigeria where interests are diverse. This is made possible because the democratic process allows for diverse interest to be articulated and aggregated for peaceful resolution in a free and fair manner. Conversely, the scenario in the Nigerian state is one in which there is loss of confidence in the democratic process because of poor political leadership which does not allow for self determination through free and fair elections, thereby, bringing about a major disconnect between the people and political leadership. This no doubt has earlier stated, led to militancy as means for articulating interests in the Nigerian fourth republic thereby threatening the unity of the Nigerian state.

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