

The Fulani Herdsmen Attack On Aku Town and Environs: The Roadmap to the Challenges

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Abstract: The Fulani herdsmen attack on Aku town in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria has opened the community to other ills plaguing the area. But the South East geo-political zone has a lot to learn from it. Just like the Ukpabi-Nimbo attack also in Enugu State, a common ground needs be found but it has to be addressed in line with its global, political and religious implications for the unity of the country.

I. INTRODUCTION

The herdsmen/farmers attack in Nigeria has assumed such a horrible dimension that it is now interpreted as disguised religious war aimed at Islamizing the country or the 19th century unfinished jihad and the consolidation of the Fulani hegemony. Thus, critical balance in assessing the situation appears tenuous, partly because of the delicate composition of the Nigerian state and largely owing to the activities of mischief makers. It will have to be admitted that these researchers position is not envious as they have an enormous and a delicate task: **non faciat malum, ut inde veniat bonum** (Not to do evil that good may come.)

For the purposes of this paper, security means, “protection against law breaking, violence, enemy acts” as defined by Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture. It is the quality or state of being secure; as freedom from danger, fear and anxiety or being attacked. As a term, security stretches to many areas of human endeavor. To counter insecurity, man has sought through personal efforts and legislations to protect himself from threats like citizenship and human rights violations, business, political, economic, industrial, engineering, nuclear, press, language and communication attacks etc.

Historically, Aku is divided into three quarters: Akutala, Akaibute and Ejuona and it is the largest community in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. With thirteen villages and sixty three family units or Otobos, Aku has through sheer industry, astuteness and relentless foray into educational pursuits singled herself out as one of the most educated communities in southern Nigeria.

In the past, Aku has faced serious security threats like most communities during the great movement in the Savana region in the sixteenth down to the eighteenth centuries. While the former was characterized by inter-tribal wars, the later was marked by the jihad of Othman dan Fodio which over ran most of the core north, north central and western states of Nigeria. According to Prof. L.O Ocho’s account, the Attah of Igala sent his officer to rule over Aku as he also sent others to rule over Nkpologu, Okpuje, Nsukka etc. It is safe to believe that the officer the Attah of Igala sent was a soldier for such a sensitive assignment in a far away land, and he, through diplomacy and political sagacity married an Aku woman and thus established his reign. But there were other wars where Aku was attacked or waged at the instance of the community: the sacking of Ugwu Amoke, the destruction of Aka Aku,, the pillage of Umu Oke, the sacking of Ikolo, the alleged submission of Lejja, the humiliation of Ohebe, the mercenary moves at Nkerefi, the war with Ukehe and the invasion of Akpugo (Ocho,1974: 23-29).

The new security waves which this paper seeks to address are: the Fulani herdsmen attacks, the youths restiveness characterized by lack of jobs, militancy ,armed robbery, assassinations, kidnapping and serious military presence in the South East (perceived by Ndigbo as a new method of psychological warfare code named **Operation Python Dance**).To lend credence to this belief, the Indigenous People of Biafra(IPOB) launched a counter operation named **Operation David Dance**, inspired by the fight between the young David, later king of Israel and the commander of Philistine army, Goliath, whom David slew. The Nigerian army claims its operation is to forestall rising crime in the south east like kidnapping, armed robbery and assassinations during the yuletide. It maintains a similar operation was launched in the Niger Delta region codenamed **Operation Eagle Eye**. In defense of its position, the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Buratai maintains, “This is part of our training activities in 2016. It is a training exercise to get our officers and men familiarize themselves with the procedures, techniques and tactics of internal security operations” (Daily Sun, Tuesday December 8, 2016, Vol. 13 No 3554)

These researchers are not in a position to disprove the sincerity of the nation’s military but the current belief in Igbo circles is that the south east is marginalized in the present government of President Muhammadu Buhari and Ndigbo think they are not wanted in the mainstream of Nigeria. Although the main actor, Dim

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu had consistently advised his kinsmen not to engage the nation in another civil war over secession before he died, the younger generation has not heeded this advice. The position could have been influenced by two ideas: either that the youths can see what Ojukwu did not see then or that they did not experience a war to teach them a lesson.

While the military operation is susceptible to other interpretations, and could be conceived as a double edged sword, one of Ojukwu's lieutenants and Africa's foremost story teller, Chinua Achebe may have identified why other nationals may be picking on the Igbo:

"I will be the first to concede that the Igbo as a group is not without its flaws. Its success can and did carry deadly penalties: the danger of hubris, overweening pride, and thoughtlessness, which invite envy and hatred or, even worse, which can obsess the mind with material success and dispose it to all kinds of showiness. There is no doubt at all there is a strand in contemporary Igbo behavior that can offend by its noisy, exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness." (There was a Country, 2012: 76)

It is undeniable there is unprecedented increase in crime across the country and the youths are at the forefront of it; either under the machinations of the aged and wealthy who send them for political violence, assassinations, kidnappings, snatching of ballot boxes or disruption of convened assemblies. The old foment troubles, fund and instigate the youths, the latter pull the trigger. Thus, while complicity can be established, the former retreat, wine and dine in the rear, the youths get killed and jailed. But the anomaly has not continued as we have seen in the Niger Delta region and indeed all over the country where the youths now turn the guns on their former bosses or terrorize them.

The 19th Century Jihad and its Effect on Aku

From available records, there was no significant success in Islamizing Aku in the 19th century. Diewa's incursion and rule had no landmark events on the religious life of Aku as there is no identifiable Muslim family in Aku. These researchers are not aware of any except there are recent conversions. His reign did not clash with the Odo cult or the traditional worship of the community. Ojiyi was and remains the flagship of traditional worship in Aku and its rival, Christianity co-habited although with intermittent clashes. Islam, as it were, and its adherents remained far away, as missionaries planted firmly the message of Christ and even with time, the latter's grip seems not to fester in our time.

The Threats of Fulani Herdsmen

Cordial relationship existed between Fulani herdsmen and Aku farmers until recently when the marriage went haywire. However, this is not an Aku or south east phenomenon but a menace that has engulfed the whole nation. It is difficult to establish why cattle rustling, taunted by the herdsmen as the main reason for their retaliatory attacks has suddenly become an issue all over the country. Is it as a result of the economic situation in the country that has led all parts of the country to steal from the herdsmen who have now become a more economically empowered group, or that the political ascendancy of the tribe to the presidency is fueling the crisis? Admittedly, the attacks of the nomads featured during the President Jonathan's regime but they were not with brazen militarism as the nation now experiences them.

The reports about Fulani herdsmen attacks all over the country are horrifying and many Nigerians now see them as **hostis humani generis** (Enemy of the human race). A report published by the SMB Intelligence, a mining and research firm on the attacks of the herdsmen in the north central region of the country accused the federal government of complicity through unhealthy silence on the "Terror in the food basket". The report maintained that the attacks were not only on life and property but agriculture as well. The attacks on Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau states left many dead and thousands displaced. The report which saw the herdsmen menace as bigger problem than the Boko Haram insurgency said 2500 people were killed annually by the sect while the herdsmen killed 2000 in north central region alone in 2015. The report also said that, "Because the government has failed to respond adequately by protecting lives and property of the citizens in the region, the herdsmen have grown bolder, and their perceived attempt to wipe out the native ethnic groups has quietly morphed into low intensity warfare. Even where the traditional rulers have attempted to call the herdsmen to peace meetings, the herdsmen routinely take advantage of these occasions to perform reconnaissance for future attacks." (Ibekwe, 2015: 3)

The reports making the rounds say the herdsmen not only kill, maim and rape women; they also deploy their herds into host communities' farms. The law prohibiting the use of unlicensed arms is not obeyed by the herdsmen who wield sophisticated weapons and use them with glee. The activities of the herdsmen appear to be organized and serial in nature and happening in all the geo-political zones of the country. The Tivs are forever locked up in battle with them. The same can be said of Berom in Plateau state where the people have been made to flee their communities. In Cross Rivers state, the Fulani attacks were in the Yukur region and the complaints were the same. In the south west, it is more complicated where the herdsmen have gone ahead to kidnap a foremost Yoruba leader, Chief Olu Falae, reported to have paid a N5 million Naira ransom before he was

released. Thoroughly humiliated by the activities of the Fulani herdsmen and looking at their activities during the jihad era, the Yoruba leaders of thought in a communiqué released on 8th October, 2015 in Oyo state after a meeting at The House of Chiefs, parliament building threatened to pull out of the federation if the nation could not protect them from the herdsmen attacks. Not done, a few days later, the herdsmen came back to terrorize Chief Falae and further humiliate him.

In Igbo land, the outcry is the same, where they butchered a whole family and a seminarian on apostolic work in Nkanu. Worrisome is the barbarism inherent in the attacks: throats were slashed, limbs amputated, wombs were slit open and unborn children removed and slaughtered. While keeping their own wives and children at safety, they raped other people's wives and daughters. Propelled by perceived religious bigotry, they did not feel contaminated when raping women of other tribes but they hated with passion giving their children in marriage to other tribes and had the morbid fear of their wives being touched by a "kaffir". In Imo state, the herdsmen have unleashed terror in Oguta, Ohaji Egbema, Orlu etc. The statement on the lips of everyone is **salus populi suprema lex esto** (The good of the people should be the supreme law). Everything that the government is doing is for the people's welfare and good governance. Why is it not so with respect to the activities of the herdsmen?

The Importance of the Herdsmen to Nigeria's Economy

As fair minded individual, you will permit us the leisure of looking at the other side, consider the nomads too- **Audi alteram partem**, as you would say. As learned men, you might have been thinking that we have been arguing **a fortiori**; that since the whole nation has been accusing the herdsmen of vandalism, we have joined in the accusation. Yes, you are right: **prius quam exaudias ne iudices** (Before you hear, do not judge). And we are in support of what Lord Denning said in his book, **The Road to Justice**: "The third principle is that the judge, before he comes to a decision against a party, must hear and consider all he has to say. No one ought to be condemned unheard. The best way, and indeed the only fair way, of reaching a correct decision on any dispute is for the judge to hear all that is to be said on each side and then come to his conclusion." (Denning, 1955: 24). In an article titled, "**Nomadic Education in Nigeria: Using English to Foster Communal Education of the Herdsmen**", Dan Chima Amadi had written, "Studies so far conducted on the history of the nomads in Africa reveal that with the exception of Somalia, nomads are in the minority wherever they may exist (Adamu, Kirk- Green: 1986). In Nigeria where they spread out in the Savanna Region, even when they constitute about five million of the 120 million of the population, they are still in the minority. Their numerical strength notwithstanding, they contribute about 95 percent of the 12 million cattle in Nigeria (Adamu: 1991). Of the nomadic groups, the cattle Fulbe also known as Mbororo form the largest group. The important role played by the Fulbe can be seen in their being the major supplier of beef, mutton, hides and skin, hoof, horn, dung for manure, bones, cow urine used in the production of medicines etc. Satisfying about 95 percent of their compatriots protein needs, they are undeniably an important segment of the nation's economy. The "janjali" tax which they pay should further elicit pity and consideration in the distribution of amenities which they are unfortunately denied." (Amadi, 2015: 16). This stated, it must be borne in mind that the nomads are not poor as their large herds are convertible to cash. The question then is, why are they so powerful and seemingly capable of overrunning the whole nation if they are in the minority? Why is everyone afraid of the herdsmen? What will happen if to protect themselves the other tribes take the law into their own hands as **quo est necessarium est licitum** ? (What is necessary is lawful). Our answer is simple; the nomad does not see an attack on his cattle as only economic. It is a religious war that must be resisted and fought to a finish. Nigerians will do well to remember that.

Sharia versus Ecclesiastical Court

Recently, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has been sponsoring a bill for the establishment of Ecclesiastical courts in the country. Although Muslims see this as unnecessary and an attempt to square up with sharia courts, CAN is following up the bill. In many quarters, Christians have been unnerved by the growing influence of Islamic institutions in the country: Nigeria's membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), Islamic bank, sharia court, Muslim commission etc. They believe that by laundering its image, Muslims can gun for their greatest fear: total islamisation of the country. The attacks of the Fulani herdsmen have heightened that fear.

Boko Haram infiltration of the Ranks of Fulani Herdsmen

Recent reports of Boko Haram infiltration of the ranks of the Fulani herdsmen have been making the rounds in the media. While the northern elders see the development as the handiwork of foreigners who are hell bent on tarnishing the image of the Fulani herdsmen, this has not placated the southerners who see the attacks as serial, coordinated and an attempt to use the medium to Islamize the country. The south appears not to be in a

hurry to forget the promise made by a northern leader, “to carry our uninterrupted journey from the desert to the sea”.

The Good job by Aku Youths Resident in Aku

In many villages in Aku , the youths are trying to bring sanity to the town. They arbitrate cases and impose sanctions on the miscreants among them. Instead of bringing in the police who will most likely be expensive, they have found a more cost effective method to administer justice. Our prayer is that prudence prevails in their actions and not lead to the case of a deity after graduating from eating fowls, goats, cows now demands to be given humans as sacrifice. But we trust Nigerians; every disease has a cure (We heard you say except AIDS).

Biafra and its Consciousness

Like in most parts of Igbo land, Biafra liberation and its consciousness have taken a firm root. While this may seem a positive development and a rallying point for Ndigbo, we must not lose sight of certain realities: massive killing of Igbo youths and its effect on the future of Ndigbo. Agitators also fail to realize that Igbos will lose all the massive investments in Abuja, where 70 percent of the houses have been said to belong to Ndigbo. As traders, we must realize we are somewhat landlocked and it was one of the reasons why we lost the civil war. In the event of the actualization of Biafra, Ndigbo will need visas to visit Nigeria and a favorable political climate to keep the investment. The choice is ours.

THREAT ANALYSIS AND ITS POSSIBLE SOLUTION

In doing a threat analysis and proffering solutions, it must be borne in mind that the greatest problem of the world today is terrorism; terrorism induced and fostered by religious dogmatism, irredentism and lack of direction. Terrorism is not just here but killing the world by the minute with a malevolent grip in all quarters. Thus, the recent attack on Aku should not be seen as routine and a one off thing. A reoccurrence must be anticipated and a quick solution found. There are instances of such attacks all over the country. First, it begins as a protest against the deployment of herds to farmlands, then accusation of cattle rustling; it is then followed by attacks and counter attacks, loss of life and property and the town becomes desolate and deserted. Government must put its two feet on the ground against the activities of the herdsmen and promulgate a very stringent law against same making it a capital offence.

Identification of Fulani Herdsmen Settlement around Aku

Since Boko Haram insurgents are now operating as herdsmen, the fall of the Sambisa forest to the Nigerian military, the insurgents are now scattered all over the country, it is important to identify all their settlements around Aku , be watchful and take census of them with the involvement of their leaders and the state government. Thank God we have a listening and humane governor in His Excellency, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi. We need to borrow from what Anambra state has done. The process is simple; any herdsman that sends his cows to a farm(s), the matter is reported and once guilt can be established, the herdsman pays the farmer. On the other hand, if someone is involved in cattle rustling, he pays for cows stolen if a case of theft can be established against him. In summary, this is an attempt to rescue mankind from bestiality and be a step ahead of terrorism.

Orientation of the People

The elite need to routinely give orientation to our people at home that may not be opportune to read the papers, watch television and feel the pulse of the nation about the activities of herdsmen. Cattle rustling are dangerous and the price is high. Violence is an ill-will that blows no one any good. Efforts must be made to keep the terrorist away.

Realization of the Nature of the Nomad

By nature, the nomad is a contented man and he does not cut a close relationship with the host community. This position should be respected as long as he lives within the confines of the law governing the host community.

Armed Vigilante Group is an Imperative

Following what is happening in the wider society, and the vicious attitude of criminals, Aku needs armed vigilante groups. For one, it will serve as a bulwark in the event of a surprise attack, and with the recent attack, vigilante groups must be in place at every yuletide because that is when the community is most vulnerable. The herdsmen are at their worst attacks when the community is asleep or during their main market days or during festive seasons. For this, we wish to commend Prof. G. C. E Mbah and co for doing a good job.

Farming is to be Done in Groups

Experience has shown that the herdsmen who meet unarmed women in farms attack and rape them because they are alone. Accordingly, farming should be done in groups and men should participate. Time should

be set aside for communal farming in a week to forestall all eventualities. It is always better to nip crisis in the bud than to wait for it to happen then retaliate. Prevention they say is better than cure.

Mindset of People Having Someone in Power

A lot has been said about the silence of Buhari's government over the activities of the herdsmen. The fact that the president is Fulani appears to be fueling the rage. But we ought to see it with the common sense it deserves. We cannot overlook the mindset of the group that is basking in the euphoria. President Obama of the United States faces the same accusation with his Obamacare, his cash gift to Iran (his name is Hussein and is considered a Muslim) and the confusing stance of the United States in the Syrian crisis. Clearly, the attacks of the herdsmen are threatening the unity of the country.

Dialogue is Key

It need be re-emphasized that peace is important in every human situation although some historians at the end of the Second World War claimed that war led to the development of nations. In this case, to our mind, dialogue is very important and high level diplomacy is needed to forestall any outbreak of violence. According to the **Global Terrorism Index** from the Institute for Economics and Peace, 17,958 people were killed in 2013 and 82% of those deaths occurred in just 5 nations: Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria. The four terrorist groups responsible for the most destructive acts are Taliban, Boko Haram, ISIS and Al-Qaeda. The report noted that radical variants of Islam were "the key commonality for all four groups."

However, every community should protect itself in the event of violence. Might is not necessarily right as world events have shown. American activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Arab Spring, American support of Israel against the Arab world and the dethronement of Ghadaffi etc have not made the world a better place. Instead, a new terrorist group has emerged –Al Qaeda has been joined by ISIS, a more deadly terrorist organization. Now the world is a more dangerous place. Imagine the boldness of terrorists now, the devilry in plowing trucks, not cars into crowds in Paris and Turkey. Who would have thought of the 9/11 American attack and seizing aircrafts from pilots and plunging all the innocent passengers into the Indian Ocean but a terrorist? Nations fight along conventional lines and put brutal soldiers on trial for war crimes.

But the terrorist thinks about unimaginable ways to draw blood. He has no principle and the urge to live. Human value means nothing to him. While you are ready to fight and live, he is ready to fight and die. So, from the word go, you are not on the same page with him. Thus, it is always better to be far away from him. By this, you can identify him and know when he is around. Since he is fuming with gun powder, it is better not to provoke him. Dialogue should be the first option and keeping him far away is far better. For all its humanitarianism, Europe will pay dearly and the lesson has begun. Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia were far wiser. Despite their enormous wealth, they never considered giving a safe haven to displaced Arabs who were even Muslims. And the reason was to keep the terrorist far away. Let us pray for Europe, particularly Germany and her Chancellor, Angela Merkel who has put that country on edge.

Aku in the Light of Truth

For inexplicable reasons, Aku expansionist policies waned in the last fifty years. The little spaces are fought over and buildings are erected indiscriminately with the attendant problems. While other communities go in search of new lands, we withdraw into our cocoon. It must be remembered that one of the reasons why the north is considered a bigger territory is land mass. States and local governments were created based on this and revenues are allocated based on it. So, what is wrong with us?

Consequences of Withdrawal Syndrome

A look at the population of Aku shows it is growing at an astronomical rate, noticeable during Christmas, Easter or Odo celebrations. The consequences of withdrawing to traditional sites or homestead are:-

1. Aku size and position will be swallowed up by smaller but spreading out communities. Even among nation states, there is relative equality and each nation has one vote. We should be bold and ask for more autonomous communities.
2. More communities will get more allocations from the state government and they will diminish our size. We have been asking for a local government, this is the time to spread out and go for it.
3. Aku neighbours will cease to see the heritage that were once our pride-population, industry, education and trade success.

Areas Earmarked for Urgent Acquisition

While no case is being made for Aku to get entangled in land disputes with her neighbours, the following traditional farmlands should be earmarked for expansion: Egu Eha, areas between Aku and Adada river, Egu Etitu and Ogbozhe

II. CONCLUSION

You might be wondering why I touched other areas you did not consider as security threats. But evil is a lack and a zone susceptible to attack. St. Augustine in his seminal work on the problem of evil leaned on the work of Plotinus and said, “evil is not a positive entity, not a being, but the lack of being, the absence of being. It is a negation or privation of being. –Evil is not a thing, therefore it was not, and could not be, created. Everything that is created is good, everything that is a substance therefore is good, but “evil the origin of which I was trying to find, is not a substance, because if it were a substance it would be good.” (Qtd in Omoregbe, 1990: 19). The identified areas are our lacks and the enemy looks for such areas. That was why we expanded the scope of the essay. If they take primacy, we have no one to blame and **lex retro non agit** (The law does not operate retroactively).

We are looking forward to a time when an Aku man will sit at various courts in the land-high court, court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. Justice Kayode Eso was a judge I respected and I look forward to a time when a son/daughter of Aku would enthuse as he did when he looked back at his landmark case, *The Mystery Gunman* he delivered on Wole Soyinka :

“The trial was over. And, in so far as I was concerned, the law had spoken and justice had triumphed. All that remained was for me to await the consequences of my defiance of the authorities, of principalities and powers, who were involved in the attempt to influence me to pervert justice. One thing was certain, I slept well that night. My conscience was clear. I had not failed principles though I knew I failed principalities. These principalities were those who, in my judgment, were around to subvert justice. I had done justice to this man, Wole Soyinka, who stood trial in my court. I had done justice to the state that prosecuted him and justice to history to which everyone, judge, counsel, witnesses and the accused, and indeed, everything belonged. I had demonstrated in my quiet ways that the Rule of Law knows no fear.” (Ade Ajayi & co, 2002: 362)

In trying to come to a conclusion, we do not want this paper to be all tragedies. There is always hope in life and we are being consoled by the words of Naguib Mahfouz (2009: 924) who in his Nobel Lecture on December 8, 1988 gave it back to the West at the Swedish Academy when he said, “In spite of all what goes on around us I am committed to optimism until the end. I do not say with Kant that Good will be victorious in the other world. Good is achieving victory every day. It may even be that Evil is weaker than we imagine. In front of us is an indelible proof: were it not for the fact that victory is always on the side of Good, hordes of wandering humans would not have been able in the face of beasts and insects, natural disasters, fear and egotism, to grow and multiply. They would not have been able to form nations, to excel in creativeness and invention, to conquer outer space, and to declare Human Rights. The truth of the matter is that Evil is a loud and boisterous debaucherer, and that man remembers what hurts more than what pleases. Our great poet Abul’-Alaa Al-Ma’ari was right when he said:

A grief at the hour of death
Is more than a hundred –fold
Joy at the hour of death.

The future can be determined if we make out time to plan. Even the author of life worked for seven days before He made sense of the void His being convoluted. Things don’t just happen; they are carefully planned animus, and then executed. We must take our destiny in our hands before it is too late (**animus possidendi**) and Equity aids the vigilant, not the sleeping (**vigilante non dormientibus aequitas subvenit**) and the law cannot help you if you are guilty of lashes and acquiescence. We thank you.

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