

CHALLENGES ON NIGERIA-CHAD RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria and the Republic of Chad are colonial creations borne out of a series of negotiations, treaties, and conquests by Britain and France respectively, in the first decade of the 20th century. The two countries share a common border of the Lake-Chad Basin, which stretches to 85 Square kilometers. Both countries obtained their political independence from their respective colonial masters in 1960 and have since been exchanging diplomatic missions and entering into various bilateral relations that border on trade, culture, education, industry, and religion with a view to promoting their mutual national interests which are central to international relations. These were not achieved without many challenges. This paper intends to examine the challenges faced in the cause of the relations between the two countries.

KEYWORDS: *Colonial Creations, Negotiations, Treaties*

INTRODUCTION

No relationship between two countries is complete without strains or possibilities of conflicts and misunderstandings. Strains are bound to occur whether on a minor scale requiring diplomatic efforts to resolve them or on a grand scale leading to a military confrontation. Chad, of all Nigeria's immediate neighbors, posed the most serious challenges to Nigeria's security issues. Since its independence in 1960, the country has witnessed innumerable political crises that led to several civil wars. These wars resulted in massive interventions by some of the regional states and from countries outside the continent of Africa. It is in view of this that this paper intends to examine the challenges on the Nigeria-Chad relations.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts the use of both primary and secondary (structured interview) sources of data. It is predominantly empirical rather than speculative. The data were obtained through a thorough and careful examination of the existing literature on Chadian crisis since 1980 to the current period of the crisis. Therefore the sources of data included textbooks, journals, magazines, internal sources and personal interviews.

Security Challenges in Nigeria-Chad Relations

According to Decalo (1989), Nigeria's relations with Chad have been severely affected by the Chadian crisis. The internationalization of the Chadian civil war and the level of arms transfer have distorted the military balance in the sub-region. The social and political problems have resulted in activities that have grossly affected bilateral relations.

The border with Chad was the only one over which Nigeria had to take a major military operation in reaction to frequent Chadian armed incursions into the Nigerian state. In fact, Decalo (1989) further stressed that the security forces in the area had to maintain a high level of operational readiness because of reports of incursions into the Nigerian territory by armed Chadian groups as well as complaints of intimidation from villagers in Borno state by Chadian gendarmes. Most of the attacks on Nigerian fishermen were conducted by breakaway units of about 20-30 rebel Chadian soldiers. Their motive was to disrupt and get the logistics during these periods 2005-2007. The “Chadian government on its part complained that Nigeria provided a hiding place for Chadian rebel factions that resided in the country as “refugees” and from there they indulged in activities designed to destabilize the government in Ndjamena (Akinboye, 1993).

The Chadian armed incursions into the border with Nigeria became so ripe while lots of lives and properties were lost to the criminal activities of the bandits. The security concern generated a high level of military alert to the extent that the government of President Obasanjo had to give orders to the military and police to patrol the Northern highways with the recently acquired helicopters gunships (the MI 35) in order to adequately check the banditry incursion into Nigeria.

The key issue that affected the security of the border region centered on the status of some islands in the Lake-Chad region jointly claimed by the two countries. Despite the demarcation of the border area by the Lake-Chad Basin Commission, attempts by both parties to stake their claim to establish effective control have resulted in armed clashes and extensive militarization of the border area (LBC, 2005).

The most persistent threat to Nigeria’s national security interest was the frequent border clashes with Chad and the continuous infiltration of armed bandits allegedly from Chad, foreign military troops close to Nigerian border and crisis among various warring factions and government forces in Chad. It was as a result of this that the Nigerian border with Chad was closed temporarily during Buhari’s administration. The closure of the border reminded Chad of mutuality of their dependence. Chad was denied its only access to the sea and to petroleum imports, which were vital to the war efforts, while Nigeria was denied cattle imports from Chad which was also important to the Nigerian consumer market.

Thus the Chad Basin farming project was often affected when violence (from the rebel factions) spread across into the Nigerian border. Farmers and villagers deserted the project for their lives as it happened in Baga in 1989 during the Nigeria-Chad fracas over some Lake-Chad islands. The clashes that occurred between April 18 and 25, 1993, with the Chadian rebels were as a result of misunderstanding among the Nigerian fishermen on the Lake Chad Basin. This led to the death of nine (9) Nigerian soldiers and the capture of nineteen others as prisoners of war in the process (Decalo, 1989).

The armed conflict between Nigeria and Chad could also be attributed to the threats posed by the national interests of Chad in the Lake Chad Basin and other mineral-rich villages and islands that bordered Nigeria and Chad. James (1997) stressed that, for the purpose of clarity, the implication to Nigeria’s national interests and security posed by the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Chad include:

- The problem of fishing on the Lake Chad Basin and the incessant harassments of Nigeria fishermen by Chadian soldiers and fishermen;
- The problem of boundary demarcation of the Lake Chad Basin area;
- Nigeria’s diminished interest in the Lake Chad Basin in favor of the Lake Chad Basin Development Authority, which was demonstrated by the huge financial commitment by Nigeria, estimated at Four Hundred and

Ninety- Eight Million Naira (₦498, 000, 000:00 only;

- The expulsion of about 700,000 Chadians affected by the Nigerian deportation order by January 17, 1983.

It is imperative to note that the Nigerian boundary with Chad (which consisted of a straight line which runs for about 76km joined the Niger tri-point at latitude 13.05 degree North and longitude 14.05 degrees east), lacks any evidence in the form of beacons or buoys that delineated the boundary between the two countries. Furthermore, the presence of countries such as France, United States, USSR, and Libya in Chad posed the military threat to Nigeria. In fact, had the crisis not been contained or subsided in time, the nation's Northern states, particularly those contiguous with Chad like Borno state would have been turned into a battleground by the various combatants or rebel factions then (James, 1997).

The Chadian crisis witnessed a significant presence of French troops in the country. For President Hussein Habre to sustain power in Chad, the French government under President Francois Mitterrand sent weapons and ammunition and increased material assistance to Chad. France initially deployed about three hundred and forty (340) military advisers, one hundred and fifty (150) paratroopers, anti-aircraft weapons and helicopters to Chad. The role of the US that supplied weapons to Chad was also very central. In 1987, US supplied Chad with seven (7) Stinger Launchers and twenty-four (24) missiles that made Chad the first African country to be supplied with Stinger Anti-aircraft Missiles (Decalo, 1999).

Most importantly, the supply of arms to the various warring factions in the crisis by foreign countries with sophisticated weapons created not only the fear of the possible infiltration of arms in Nigeria but also the likelihood of such weapons being utilized by warring factions to destabilize the country's North-Eastern zone. This is because Chad represented very weak and fragile link in the chain of security which is liable to be manipulated and exploited by external actors (Adefuge, 1999).

Socio-Cultural and Economic Challenges in Nigeria-Chad Relations

It was clear that the Chadian crisis has many implications for Nigeria's national interests. The crisis led to an outflow of a large number of Chadian refugees to Nigeria. The refugees headed mainly for Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, in search of means of livelihood. The consistent influx of refugees placed additional strains on the limited economic resources of drought-stricken Borno state (Fage, 2002).

Most of the Chadian refugees were women, children and old people, who took to the streets begging, thereby increasing social malaise especially in Maiduguri the Borno state capital. The refugees, those of the age bracket between 25 and 50 years engaged in armed banditry, pickpocketing and outright stealing which increased Nigeria's social problems as it happened during the 1990-91 Sahelian drought. The repatriation of Chadians in 1980 alone was estimated at about 40,000 refugees while Chadian refugees were reported to have crossed the border into Nigeria. By 1983 the refugee problem had grown to a point where the Nigerian government had to respond and repatriate some 700,000 illegal refugees in Chad. Chad's economy was poor and badly affected by the civil war. It couldn't have been possible to have any meaningful development of independence, bearing in mind, a situation where a large proportion of the nation's population had to fend for itself as refugees in other countries in the sub-region. This weak economy as well led to Chad's over-dependence on wealthier states who may wish to secure an operational base in the sub-region. Thus, Chad, like some of the other states in the sub-region, has a weak security network. A clear example is the presence of foreign military troops in

Chad (Agbakoba, 1998).

The cost of the Chadian crisis on the Nigeria-Chad relations accounts to the huge financial wreckage. When Libya withdrew from Chad in 1981, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) saw the need to send a peacekeeping mission as the replacement. The United States and France promised financial and logistical support to the troops. The US promised the sum of \$40 million dollars, but this did not materialize.

In November, 1981 the OAU was able to raise Four Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$400, 000 00) only, which was a non-starter for such an operation. To this end, Benin, Togo, and Guinea could not send troops to Chad as agreed, because the countries should support their own contingents for their upkeep. Thus, as this became clear, all the contributing states withdrew and left the financial burden on Nigeria. Nigeria bore the brunt, spending ₦5 million monthly for the upkeep of the Nigerian troops of three (3) battalions for a period of nearly one year.

The fuelling of OAU vehicles and aircraft as well as the vehicles of other countries was borne by Nigeria, which ran into millions of Naira. Thus, at a point, Nigeria had to feed starving Senegalese troops for one month until their resources arrived. Even though U.S and France pledged to support OAU forces, they only settled for the bilateral assistance of their respective allies. For the task of organizing the various peace conferences in Kano, Lagos and later Abuja for finding solutions to the Chadian crisis, Nigeria spent huge resources, especially in respect of accommodating, feeding and entertaining the Chadian leaders alongside the rebel factions. It was also Nigerian planes that shuttled to and fro in bringing and returning the Chadian leaders and the rebel factions to the conferences (Decalo, 1999). This in monetary terms amounted to almost one million dollars. The national interests shown by the superpowers in the Chadian crisis is another problem in Nigeria-Chad relations.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper attempted to discuss the challenges faced in the cause of Nigeria-Chad relationship. It explored the socio-cultural, economic as well as security challenges that the two countries are facing in their relations. The paper submitted that there is the need for both countries to address these problems most especially the security challenges that tried to hamper their relations. The paper further stresses on the issue of repatriation of Chadians in 1980 by Shagari's administration and how this repatriation strained the relations of the two countries. Shouldering of the financial burden by Nigeria during the reconciliation efforts between government forces and the rebel factions was equally discussed.

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