

An Evaluation of Chinese Military Training the Nigerian Military

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ABSTRACT

Security of life and property is the cardinal objective of nations in their daily engagements. Therefore, governments make concerted efforts to ensure a society free from internal and external security challenges. To this end, they enter into various defence co-operations and pacts with technologically advanced nations with advanced military capabilities. International relations and politics are generally understood as a set of actions, reactions, and interactions between sovereign states, mediated by National Interest and their foreign policies. Training programs for Nigeria's military and security personnel are a significant point of Nigeria-China security cooperation. Every year, the Nigerian military undertakes training programs in military operations across the Air Force, Army, and Naval Force. This work aims at answering the heart-wrenching question of: Is training by the Chinese Military for the Nigerian Military a worthy exercise? This paper examines the issues in Nigeria-China security cooperation. Secondary sources and thematic analysis were used. Also, the Marxian theory was used as a theoretical framework. It was discovered that Nigeria-China security cooperation has yielded appreciable outcomes with the protection of individual interests as the focal point of the parties.

Keywords: Cooperation; Development; Security; Nigeria-China

I. INTRODUCTION

Security is critical to the survival of any nation, as it helps forestall lawlessness, chaos, and the eventual disintegration of the system. Security is considered a dynamic condition that involves a state's relative ability to counter threats to its core values and interests (Omede, 2011). Similarly, Nwolise (2006) states that security is an all-encompassing, holistic concept, implying that a network of armed forces must secure the territory; that the sovereignty of the state must be guaranteed by a democratic and patriotic government, protected by the military, police, and the people themselves. The people must not only be secure from external attacks but also from devastating consequences of internal upheavals, unemployment, hunger, starvation, diseases, ignorance, homelessness, environmental degradation and pollution and socioeconomic injustices. In

all places and countries, security is a multidimensional subject of numerous debates and is considered a 'first-order value' worth preserving.

The concept of security is widened from the level of the states to societies and individuals, and from military to non-military issues. Dyke (1966) asserts that national security embodies the sovereignty of the state, the inviolability of its territorial boundaries, and the right to individual and collective self-defence against internal and external threats. However, the state is secure only when the aggregate of people organised under it has a consciousness of belonging to a common sovereign political community, enjoys equal political freedom, human rights, and economic opportunities, and when the state itself can ensure independence in its development and foreign policy. The non-strategic school of thought defines national security as not just military defence of territory but also internal stability, socioeconomic development, and the protection of the country's life, property, and economic resources by constituted authorities through security bodies.

China has been involved in African affairs since the 1950s. At that point, African states began to free themselves from colonial rule. As a result, China's interaction with Africa in modern times has been characterised by the former's support for liberation movements, which eventually led to the majority of African nations being liberated from colonial rule in the 1960s. The initial reasons for China's support were primarily ideological, but this changed over the following decades (Adigbuo, 2021).

Nigeria built relationships with China over time because it believed that, as developing countries, they shared similar interests. This relationship also existed in multilateral institutions like the UN, where Nigeria and China each had a significant impact on the appointment of a developing country's representative as Secretary-General. Of course, Nigeria, in the context of Africa, had also been crucial in securing China's admission as a permanent member of the UN, because Taiwan was initially considered and held a seat on the UN Security Council.

China has always been highly appreciative of Africa, and Nigeria in particular, for its role in enabling it to join the UN and the permanent Security Council, as evidenced by the then-Chinese ambassador JinYongjian's admission that the

Chinese will never forget the events of the 1971 UN episode. On the 10th of January, 2025, Nigeria and China plan collaboration on military training and Arms production (Purch, 2025). The federal Government says its deepening of security partnership with the People's Republic of China is for local production and military training. It says this action is part of its broader strategy to tackle terrorism and other forms of insecurity within and outside its borders. Military strength relates to the conventional notion that power is backed by military force. The military strength of a given nation-state can be measured by the funds expended for defence and security. A related factor is location outside its territory. Such military mobility hinges on the nation-state's ability to sustain military operations on land, at sea, and in the air. The ultimate success of the nation-states, however, would depend on intangible factors such as preparedness, training, leadership, morale, etc., which affect the performance of armed forces in a given situation. This paper aims to look at whether the training of the Nigerian Military by the Chinese military is a worthy exercise.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marxian Theory: Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883)

He studied law at the university of Bonn in Germany in 1835 and Philosophy at the university of Berlin in 1836. He was married to Jenny, a botanist at the University of Bonn in Germany, in 1835, and studied Philosophy at the University. He had six children. The name Marx was coined from Mordechai and Markus. He and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1948 (Mbah,2006). This theory explains that the military relationship between China can only be understood through the lens of imperialism and unequal exchange. According to Marxist theory, powerful nations like China exploit weaker nations like Nigeria through economic and military means.

In the context of Nigeria and China, Marxist theory would argue that China's growing military presence and economic investments in Nigeria constitute neo-imperialism. China's actions are driven by its desire to expand its economic and geopolitical influence in Africa, while Nigeria is motivated by its need for economic development and security.

Key aspects of Marxist theory in this context;

1 Imperialism: China's military and economic expansion in Nigeria is seen as imperialism, in which a powerful nation exploits a weaker one.

2 Unequal exchange: The economic relationship between the two countries is characterised by unequal exchange, where Nigeria's natural resources and labour provide limited benefits to Nigeria

3 Dependency theory: Nigeria's reliance on China for economic development and security creates a dependent relationship, where Nigeria is vulnerable to China's economic and political influence. This theory provides a

critical lens on the military relationships between Nigeria and China, showing the power dynamic and unequal exchange that characterise their interaction

Methodology

This paper adopted an expositional factor research design and gathered data from secondary sources such as books, journal articles, manuscripts, internet materials, and conference papers. It used content analysis to analyse the data gathered.

Nigeria and China Relations

When China began its "Opening up and Reform Policy" in the 1980s, a comprehensive plan that gave rise to the modern China, there was a significant change in the dynamics of the relations between China and Africa. China's current relations with Africa are driven by economic and geostrategic interests rather than a desire to export a particular political philosophy. As China's economic and political influence grew and it became more resource-hungry, the intensity of its relations with Africa also changed. Since her independence, Nigeria's successive governments' foreign policy positions have appropriately recognised both bilateral and multilateral trade and economic relations.

In February 1971, the same year that the communist People's Republic of China won a seat on the UN Security Council, Nigeria and China formally re-established diplomatic ties. Nigeria also celebrated the conclusion of its ten-year post-colonial existence (1960–1970) as an independent state in 1971 (Akinterinwa, 2016). Nigeria-China relations, however, have not been excellent because China supported Biafra by arming them during the civil war. Even though the late Gen. Sani Abacha, the then military head of state, welcomed the Chinese government during his administration, other Western allies turned their backs on Nigeria as a result of the violations of human rights he was responsible for. The successful resolution of the Nigerian civil war in 1970 and China's recognition of the PRC in 1971 provided both nations with new opportunities.

What do China's interests in Nigeria consist of? Wang Jisi, a scholar from China, offers some clarification. According to Jisi, the following three questions can help nation-states in the international system implement their grand strategy: What are the primary interests of the country? What external principalities or forces pose a threat to them? What are the key leadership positions in defending those fundamental interests? Every nation's foreign policy should typically be organised around these issues; Nigeria's or China's understanding and appreciation of the strategic significance of their respective core national interests aid in their realisation. The pursuit and accomplishment of a nation's primary foreign policy goals takes the form of bilateral and, occasionally, multilateral relations (Zainab & Sheriff, 2018).

China, however, is achieving economic dominance through rapid growth across all fronts as part of its foreign policy. Is Nigeria actually achieving its foreign policy goals and experiencing development in line with its focus on economic growth and development? Trade between China and Nigeria has been imbalanced because China benefits more from the relationship than Nigeria does. Nigeria imports more from China than it exports, and neither its infrastructure nor Nigerians' standard of living has experienced sufficient economic growth. Nigeria has suffered dramatically as a result of China's consistent extraction of Nigerian oil for its economic development (Osimen & Micah, 2022).

Poor bilateral relations are relatively easy to explain in terms of foreign policy analysis because there are frequently many different contributing factors. Deep and warm relationships are supported by a variety of factors that help strong bonds form and prevent minor irritations from festering. Explaining the absence of relations between two small, far-off nations is not difficult either. Some factors would suggest that this relationship should have been much more significant than it was for the first 50 years, but explaining the relationship between China and Nigeria and why it has been so unimportant for so long is difficult.

The worthiness or unworthiness of China's military training for the Nigerian military

Nigeria is confronted with the challenges of security in the North-East and West through incessant terrorist attacks, banditry and other numerous domestic challenges. In an effort to overcome the foregoing challenges, a development agenda and cooperative engagements have been established, diplomatic relations signed with countries like the United States of America (USA), Britain, Germany, France and Russia, with the primary aim of solving these problems. Within these plethoras of cooperating frameworks, much has been left unachieved; therefore, the need to look outside traditional and established diplomatic partners (Ambalietal, 2020).

The efforts of China as regards joining hands to combat the mirage of insecurity issues confronting the continent of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular are raised by Ubi (2013: p.224) when he states that "...some people have queried the aloofness of China vis-à-vis Africa's security needs. How can China embrace a continent that is home to a catalogue of security challenges like wars, terrorism, insurgencies, mass upheavals, or refugees that have condemned many Africans to misery, and even threatened the very existence of states across the continent and yet still maintain a policy of non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of these countries?

This, and many other questions, have raised the issue of Chinese security cooperation and engagement with Africa and Nigeria, given its investments and interests in the

continent. However, given China's clearly articulated policy of non-intervention and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations, the country has established a distinct approach to engaging with countries in solving the challenges posed on the continent and its people through holistic economic development framework that provides human basic needs, lack of which according to (Ubi, 2020) is a major instigator of conflicts ravaging the continent.

Training programs for Nigeria's military and security personals was major point of Nigeria-China security cooperation. Every year, the Nigerian military undertook training programs in military operations such as the Air Force, the Army and Naval Force. In 2015, the Nigerian Navy reached an understanding to provide training programs in order to improve the operational capabilities of the force. The agreement stipulates that the Chinese government would send two naval instructors to the country on secondment (National Mirror, 2016). Corroborating the above a respondent indicated that, Nigeria-China security arrangement was not contained in any astute defence pact in terms of aiding Nigeria's determination to mitigate terrorism and its domestic insecurity. Like other countries that sometimes give impetus to some of these crises in secret or covertly to benefit from the situation, but for China, this has not been said about them. Therefore, in China's security engagement and cooperation with Nigeria and Africa, the Pre-emptive Peace and Security Approach (PPSA) guided Chinese engagements with its partners (Ambali et al., 2020). Through this approach, China pre-empted conflict, insecurity, and crisis, and also pre-empted peace by putting in place structures and frameworks that will mitigate the occurrence of any ugly situation. The Chinese government did not wait for issues to arise or for situations to degenerate into anarchy before proffering solutions, as in the AU security architecture, where they react only after seeing early warning signals. In addressing insecurity, China often informs its partners to do the right thing, such as fixing poverty, infrastructure, economic development and good governance, which is cheaper than the preventive approach. Once these structures and frameworks are put in place, you do not need to think of replacement because these problems will not arise in the first instance. However, when these structures and frameworks are absent, what nations do amounts to preventive actions with little or no results. This argument is not far from the developmental approach that other scholars have deployed in analysing insecurity in Nigeria.

Therefore, the Chinese government made securing the lives of its nationals and its business interests a top priority in Nigeria. Though the Chinese government would not send its military personnel to the field in any country, it trained and cooperated with nations through training, supplying weapons and intelligence gathering. The Chinese government would not train any country on how to fight or

prosecute its military operations because of domestic peculiarities but will always engage in knowledge sharing. After the 2015 FOCAC summit, the Chinese government gave Nigeria \$50 million in aid to combat domestic security challenges. It was the only country that sold arms and military equipment to Nigeria when the US government stopped the Israeli government from selling arms to Nigeria because of allegations of human rights abuse and misuse of the war equipment. To protect individual and collective interests, it is reasonable to postulate that both countries benefited from establishing a peace and security framework. Gambo (2018, p. 255) avers that "China is actively involved in tackling both human and national security challenges through various forms of economic and military assistance in addition to a wide range of FDI. The bilateral peace and security cooperative framework between the two countries has brought about significant improvements in Nigeria's peace and security environment. The fight against Boko-Haram insurgency in the northeast part of the country got a boost when China sold some critical military hardware to Nigeria. China also contributed to stabilising the volatile oil-rich Niger Delta through its peace-building activities.

Nigeria-China Security Cooperation within the FOCAC Framework, the international system perennially faces the challenge of peace and security. The rise of terrorist groups across international boundaries, insurgency, illicit flow of arms, and other forms of insecurity have come to undermine mankind's collective resolve to drive the desired development agenda and save humanity from the many challenges created by these raging challenges. Therefore, the internationalisation and global perspective on insecurity have led nations to collaborate, cooperate, and engage one another in a bid to find a lasting solution to these common human enemies. More importantly, the effect of globalisation has further increased the spate and flow of actions that threaten human existence, which Africa, in general and Nigeria, in particular, is not exempt from.

The basis for Nigeria-China strategic engagement is succinctly brought to the fore by Gambo (2018, p. 263), who avers that the asymmetric security challenges Nigeria has been contending with since the return to democratic governance in 1999 cannot be unilaterally addressed without building a strategic partnership with other actors across the globe. The Boko Haram insurgency that has been ravaging the Northeast part of the country since 2009 cannot be effectively and expediently decimated without soliciting the support and goodwill of the international community, especially neighbouring states where the insurgents are likely to move into when given a chase and countries whose business and investment interests would be affected by the prevailing domestic challenges. In a bid to address the challenges posed to human capacity to develop individually and across international boundaries, individual countries in

the international system have joined forces to address their particular problems.

Therefore, amidst various cooperative and bilateral frameworks between nations on trade, commerce, infrastructural development and technology transfer, nations have gone further to establish functional diplomatic agreements that explicitly include security cooperation and engagement, such as seen in the Nigeria-China security arrangement to protect individual interests and ultimately to put in perspective the productive outcome of every development aspiration and engagement. Ensuring an atmosphere of peace and security has been the pressing concern of sovereign states, especially given the growing nature of interdependence and engagement in the international system. This is particularly so because the presence or absence of peace and security constitutes a fundamental requirement for the actualisation of nations and the world's development needs. Nations pursuing development are mostly recipients of investment capital from developed countries. To attract investors, therefore, nations, especially developing countries, must pay adequate attention to their domestic security needs and concerns, which are a fundamental requirement for attracting Foreign Direct Investment.

The essence of security cooperation between Nigeria and China, or, put comprehensively, between China and Africa, was to, within the existing development and trade framework, protect the interests of the parties without jeopardising lives and substantial financial investments. Nigeria-China security and peace cooperation was necessary when Nigeria became a theatre of a multitude of asymmetric peace and security challenges, such as terrorism, insurgency, kidnapping, armed banditry and robbery with far-reaching implications for the growing investment profile of China across sectors of the Nigerian economy, particularly in the oil and gas sector where it has considerable interest (Gambo, 2018).

Considering this, FOCAC, as a multilateral framework between China and Africa, has placed the security of the lives and property of the parties at the forefront, as evident in the various FOCAC white papers and agreements since its maiden summit in 2000. The foundation of this position, according to President Hu Jintao, as cited in Agwu (2013: p. 433), lies in the fact that the Chinese nation loves peace and will join any nation that seeks peace in actualising this primary requirement for development. China's development, instead of hurting, threatening anyone, or joining others to hurt any nation, can only serve peace, stability, and shared prosperity in the world. Van Staden, cited in Alli (2018), writes that "... Chinese engagement with Nigeria and Africa in confronting insecurity is hinged on its reforms aimed at, amongst other things, the expansion of the roles of the PLA on the international security stage,

engaging the national government for safeguarding the economic interests of parties.”

Similarly, its expansionist agenda has held the pursuit of peace with its partners sacrosanct. This and many other positions informed Chinese input aimed at mitigating the mirages of insecurity in Africa and Nigeria in particular where insecurity stalled the pace of development. Security of life and property is the cardinal objective of nations in their daily engagements. Therefore, the government makes concerted efforts to ensure a society free from internal and external security challenges, and in doing so, they enter into various defence cooperation and pacts with technologically advanced nations with advanced military capabilities, such as the Anglo-American defence pact established in 1963. The contemporary Nigerian is facing different security challenges such as terrorism, militancy, communal clashes, armed robbery and banditry with grave consequences on human existence. The Northern part of the country has become a theatre of violence and conflict with lives being lost in hundreds daily (Ambalietal, 2020).

Therefore, providing a lasting solution to these threats has become a top priority for the government, thereby necessitating security cooperation with its development partners. According to some respondents, security cooperation and engagement within Nigeria-China relations remained an agenda meant to protect collective interests and investment. While Nigeria was pursuing a holistic agenda to ensure the security of lives and property of the citizens, the Chinese government was collaborating with Nigeria through capacity building, which formed the heartbeat of FOCAC, in ensuring that Chinese nationals and businesses in Nigeria are guaranteed adequate protection and safety. The Nigerian and Chinese governments shared aspirations to drive their collective interest in Nigeria and across Africa.

Agreeing with the above, Gambo(2018) avers that the basis and terms of engagement between Nigeria and China have covered areas such as the economic, social, cultural, and technological, as well as interests aimed at driving individual and collective development aspirations. However, as the relations grew, there was an urgent need to begin to factor in the peace and security within the domestic environment in order to ensure the safety and stability of investment in the volatile regions across Nigeria. China was also committed to supporting the efforts of states in Africa and regional organisations to improve their counterterrorism operations and capabilities, and, within the same parameter, to drive development-compliant economic activities.

This would frustrate and weaken the foundations of terrorist activities. This position was and is promoted through multilateral platforms, which enable the Chinese government to work with and through regional, continental, and global bodies (Wei, 2010; FOCAC, 2015). According to a respondent, Beijing's engagement with Nigeria is limited tonumerous training programs and the supply of military

equipment to support the country's counterinsurgency operation. Nigeria does not have a security/defence arrangement with China. What Nigeria has is Military Cooperation. However, it is important to note that China does not have a defence pact with any country in the developing world, as it adheres to a policy of non-interference and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries.

Some argue that there is inter-agency cooperation between Nigeria and China, as seen in the collaboration between the Ministry of Defence and the People's Liberation Army of China. Importantly, Chinese nationals are also experiencing the outcome of insecurity in Nigeria as they are being kidnapped in oil fields across the South-South region and have also become victims of terrorist operations, insurgency and attacks in the Northern part of Nigeria. The structure and systems of the Chinese government in Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, are built on the cooperative security framework advanced by Rodger (2012) and Gambo (2018). This framework enables the aggregation of cooperative efforts to address security issues and their attendant effects in areas of interest.

Therefore, the assistance China was offering the country was not just in Nigeria's and its citizens' interests but also to ensure that China's interests were adequately protected. The military training, manpower development programs, supply and sales of weapons, and support for intelligence gathering only point to the fact that there was an interest in protecting and helping to solve security challenges by China, Chinese businesses, and nationals in Nigeria. That is why security operatives are protecting Chinese construction workers and expatriates wherever they go. The insecure situation, or any situation for that matter, would adversely affect their investment. In a study conducted by Gambo (2018) on Nigeria-China peace and security cooperation, it was noted that as bilateral relations between Nigeria and China deepened, consolidated, and diversified, covering areas of interest beyond economic and trade, the need for adequate peace and security in Nigeria became unavoidable.

Given the fact that China's vast interest in the country cannot be optimally achieved under an unsecured atmosphere, both countries became concerned about promoting peace and security cooperation through enhanced strategic diplomatic relations, which commenced in 1999 in Nigeria and also across Africa and became a focal point of the various FOCAC summits and conferences. Other respondents pointed out that securing Chinese nationals and raw materials (oil) interest in the Niger Delta region of the country, where they were victims of kidnapping and other forms of insecurity, had, amongst other things, informed Chinese interest not just in Nigeria but across the continent, where issues of security had become a concern to national governments' efforts. The Chinese government and investors were guided in their engagement with local

communities and investment destinations by the presence or absence of peace and security, and by the environment and institutional framework that would promote it.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Important progress was made in intelligence gathering in the North East, where a major counter-insurgency operation by the Nigerian military is still ongoing. Nigeria-China strategic cooperation also led to the signing of an MOU covering peace and security engagement. According to a top military officer at the Ministry of Defence, the insecurity problem ravaging the country is not our problem, as it affects, and still affects, the sub-region and every country with business and economic engagement with Nigeria. I think the Chinese government, through its representative in Nigeria, recognised this obvious fact, and it is still doing a lot to support the fight against insecurity in Nigeria and across Africa.

The continued purchase and timely supply of military equipment and gadgets used in executing Nigeria's counterinsurgency operation in the Northern part of Nigeria, despite the West's refusal to make them available for Nigeria's use, citing incidents of human rights abuse as a pointer to the gains made through Nigeria-China peace and security cooperation.

The strategic importance of China to Africa vis-à-vis Nigeria was noted by Atuahene (2009, p.47), who writes, "if there is any lesson for Africa on how to structure its economy and balance it with indigenous way of doing things, then, we can only learn from China". This position was also advanced by Wagner and Cafiero (2013), who assert that "it is generally believed that the growing economic partnership with China provides the average Nigerian with reasons for optimism about their own plans for prosperity". Security cooperation in Nigeria-China relations was based on protecting various Chinese investment interests in Nigeria. The importance of a secured environment for the growth of Chinese interest in Africa vis-à-vis Nigeria was recognised by successive FOCAC summits and conferences which were vigorously pursued through manpower development and training of security personnel in the Nigerian armed forces, viz Navy, Air Force and Army and the supply of military hardware for the execution of counter-insurgency operations, sea piracy and kidnapping threats across the federation.

Furthermore, it was discovered that China sold military hardware to Nigeria in 2011 when the USA discouraged the Israeli government from doing so on the grounds of alleged abuse of human rights in the course of fighting insurgency in the North West. Also, the Chinese government, in its security cooperation and engagement with Nigeria, pursued a pre-emptive peace approach based on a holistic focus on providing a development-driven society where the basic

needs of the people were met, thereby quelling the outbreak of violence. This is seen in China's concerted effort in infrastructure development and in the country's growing trade and investment.

The security of the continent vis-à-vis Nigeria is primary for the success of Nigeria-China diplomatic and bilateral relations. Findings revealed that Nigeria-China security cooperation and engagement covered the core areas where Chinese interests would be protected. These included the supply of warships to check piracy on the waterways and the kidnapping of vessels in transit. The training of members of the Nigerian Army and Air Force in modern counter-insurgency operations on land and in the air was first based on securing Chinese business interests in the country. The enhancement of security cooperation between China and Nigeria was predicated on China's drive to ensure the security of its nationals and businesses across the country, which had become victims of insecurity.

These actions have been extended to Nigeria, given China's engagement and cooperation with Nigeria in addressing its numerous security challenges, such as the sale of military equipment for air and naval operations. The growing security challenges in the country require urgent, workable government intervention, such as uniting the country through patriotic leadership that will address all grievances, within the framework of the Pre-emptive Peace and Security Approach, which encourages development initiatives and programs rather than a reactive security approach. Upon the foregoing, the Nigerian government should leverage the benefits of the Nigeria-China engagement and the outcomes of the FOCAC summits and conferences to promote and sustain a peaceful environment in Nigeria where the economy can thrive and deliver its expected outcomes. This paper therefore recommends a strong alliance with any country that maintains a non-interference policy toward Nigeria, aimed at protecting the lives and property of Nigerians. Also, it is high time Nigerians demonstrate their status as the giant of Africa by having good governance and peaceful means of resolving conflicts.

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