

NIGERIA AND THE RISE OF MILITIAS

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An explosion of militias, some government-backed, is currently rocking the country. Armed, aggressive and unaccountable, these militias are symptoms of Nigeria's insecurity and militate against its security. Government has failed to provide security. States, groups and individuals are compelled to fend for themselves. Nigeria's boundless landscape has many insecure spots. And militias to go with them. In the Southwest, there is Amotekun. Ebubeagu in the Southeast. Nigeria's South-South has many militias competing for the country's black gold. In the North, vigilante militias have evolved to fight or contribute to insecurity. Some of them are partners with Nigeria's security forces in the combat against insecurity.



rival groups which come to inflict maximum damage. Thus, where government failure leaves a vacuum, others step in. Like other Nigerians, Miyetti Allah fear for their lives and cattle. They have contributed significantly to Nigeria's cauldron of insecurity. They have also been accused of fomenting insecurity. It is why this move fiercely raises eyebrows. Which Miyetti Allah is showing up in the vigilante group? Is it the one conscious of Nigeria's security, or the one accused of compromising it? Already, the Nasarawa State government has denied having a hand in the formation of the group. If it is true, the group would have spun its story.

In Nasarawa State, Miyetti Allah's decision to front a vigilante group has worked up a cyclone. The group says it is a response to banditry which disproportionately affects its members who are cattle rearers. The move is causing apprehension because the group has been fingered as a key provocateur in deadly farmer-herder conflicts in North central Nigeria, many feel there is more to it. But one more militia may not be too much in Nigeria now. What is too much is the seeming incompetence of a government that can neither protect men nor cattle.

So far, Nigeria has refused to entertain the idea of state police. Security personnel are stretched across the country. Poorly equipped, poorly motivated and facing superior weapons, Nigeria has been mostly second best in the war for its survival. The slaughter has been great in the last decade. Borno, Zamfara, Yobe, Benue, Niger, Kaduna, Plateau, Katsina have all felt the piercing pinch of insecurity. Cowed Nigerians who have mostly ignored calls for self-defense have been open to the idea of militias. One reason is that it is a mark of the compelling regional rivalry which marks Nigeria. The 1914 amalgamation was far from a masterstroke. The fissures prove it. The friction confirms it. In politics, religion, economics, and everywhere else, the competition is forceful.

Even when voting blocs come together to form Nigeria's government, it is often a marriage of convenience with a lot of suspicion. The militias operating in different parts of the country are a sign of suspicion. Suspicious of each other, Nigeria's many parts front military groups just in case. But beyond being regional show of force, the militias ward off

It should alarm government at all levels that individuals and groups are taking their security into their hands. Non-state actors arming themselves under different guises should alarm the government. In many ways, it is an admission of failure that individuals and groups are now resorting to protecting themselves. It is an indictment of the government.

Nigeria's bloated budget provides billions for security every year. Yet, it is Nigerians armed with sticks and knives who must defend themselves from the daily assaults of ruthless terrorists. Unfortunately, Nigeria has become a clear example of what can happen when a promising country lacks the right people in power. These militias are only symptoms of the disease that insecurity has become on the body of Nigeria. It is like a cancer which is metastasizing gradually. Experience shows that it cannot be checked like half measures like arresting the brains behind the militias. Any action taken must be total. When people do not have confidence in the ability of the state to protect them and theirs, they will look for the means with which to help themselves. For as long as people feel that the government is treating the issue of insecurity with kid gloves, they will look for means by which to hammer out fists of iron and tackle the deadly scourge.

The threat to the country's sovereignty is clear. Armed groups, controlling vast swaths and refusing any accountability, can act with rampant impunity. And though there are no unanimous indicators of what a failed government looks like, there is a near consensus that a government that cannot guarantee the security of its citizens is a failed government.