

BOOK REVIEW

NNOLI, Okwudiba (2006) *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective*. Enugu: PACREP publishers. Pages: 289 ISBN: 978-049-630-0.

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The book *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective* is authored by Okwudiba Nnoli and published in 2006 by the Pan African Centre for Research on Peace and Conflict Resolution (PACREP). Widely acknowledged for his seminal work: *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, the author is motivated to write this book “by the death and suffering which violent conflicts and civil wars have imposed on the African people over the years” (Nnoli, 2006). The work itself is anchored on two interrelated critical concerns. The first concern is to establish what is responsible for the situation as identified, and secondly, to find out how the situation can be remedied.

The book under review is set on what constitutes national security in Africa considering the Westphalia state system and the attendant intra-state conflicts on the continent. One is poised to suggest that Africans should look inwards towards solving this puzzle by looking for solutions to African problems. He points to the numerous social, economic and cultural conflicts endemic in the state system Africa inherited from the defunct colonial imperial powers. While the Westphalia state system came to be in 1648 after the thirty year in Europe between 1614 and 1648, it is important to note that there was no centralized system of recognized in international relations as it were. He points to the fact that Monarchs, Bishops, Barons, nobles and serfs amongst others dominated the scene and Baron’s were associated with having fighting forces and can choose to support whoever they decide to support and when the need arises can re-align their support.

The foregoing situation brought chaos in Europe and following the writings of philosophers like Jean Jacques Bodin and Thomas Hobbes, the statehood system was agitated were absolutism and sovereignty was to be ascribed to a central entity with the monopoly of the instrument of violence to poses a geographical location, government and a standing military to defend the state from external attack. However, because the Westphalia styled state were highly agrarian the need for balance of power occasioned alliance formation as a means of wadding of external threat. As Nnoli stated (2006:.24) “during the Westphalia era, alliance formation was the only realistic way of threatening the security of state or

resisting such a threat". It is worthy of mention that during this period, diplomacy and international trade were also employed in security issues.

This conception of the state system - the survival of the state - puts the state above any other consideration giving those in authority the responsibility and authority for what constitutes national security of the state. This conception gives the state a realist connotation and the instrument at the leader's disposal was the military designed by the Westphalia styled state for defence from external attack. This was used by African leaders to crush opposition and kill political critics of their various administration. These internal strives can be seen in countries like Somalia, Rwanda, Congo DR., Sierra Leone, Burundi amongst others with the resultant humanitarian situation having to contain with Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) running away from wars and natural disasters.

With the extinction of the Cold war and the fall of Berlin wall in the early 1990's national security and the role of the military as the instrument used to defend a country from external aggression changed and the incidence of internal threats were uppermost on the African continent. Agitations for good governance, participatory democracy, fair play, sustainable economy, human security, environmental and a host other concerns formed new expectations in national security on the continent. It is worthy to mention that Africa was only keyed into the Westphalia state system and was not in the making of it as the peculiarities were European based. Accordingly, Nnoli points out that:

the colonial origins of the Africa States ensure that power was the defining attribute of statehood. All the other non-coercive elements such as morality norms, values, customs and traditions ... historically derived checks and balances that diluted such power over the years in pre-colonial Africa and elsewhere in the world were conspicuously absent (p79).

The African states tend to protect the interest of business partners than the citizens she should protect. Accordingly, Nnoli laments that "often an alliance between the government and the oil company means that an attack on one of them by a community is interpreted as an attack on both of them" (p.92) A good example is the Ogoni crisis, Umuechen and Odi massacres.

The author is of the view that National security in Africa and elsewhere should be citizen oriented "in other words ... security moves away from a narrow focus on defense against external threats and anchors it on threats from domestic environment" (p.228). To him national security includes: human security, environmental security, economic security and social as well as the security of ethnic group. He added that national security should ensure good governance, education, health, shelter amongst others as their absence breeds insecurity in Africa.

Finally, Nnoli suggested new roles of the military in Africa which includes (i)prevention of conflicts through early warning system(ii)the military should not be under the executive(iii)the military be made an independent arm of government(iv)there should be a national security commission to oversee the activities of the military.

Commendation and Critique

Nnoli's book is a breeder and show cases the ingenuity of African intellects in the bid to proffer lasting solution to African security problems. The strength of the book lies largely on the fact that it underlines the specificity of the African situation. Thus rather than the common syndrome of copying Western models and structures of what constitutes national security he points out that the syndrome is actually the bane in the continent. In this sense the work complements usefully with Walter Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and Makodi Biereenu-Nnabugwu's (2005) *Africa in the March of Civilization*; all of which go to underline the peculiarities of the African situation. There is no doubt that Nnoli's (2006) *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective* is the right step in the right direction and that he did justice to what he set out to do.

Nevertheless, it needs be pointed out that the Westphalia state order was a critical element in the promotion of Westphalia state system and the emergence of Euro-centric order at the world stage. This is because it did not only bring together the multiple spheres of authority under one sovereign and recognized governments in Europe, but also provided structural impetus and instrument for colonization of other lands and peoples. It therefore behooves on the victims of colonialism to apply creativity and turn the weapon of domination into a real device for genuine development. This is where Nnoli's (2006) *National Security in Africa: A Radical Perspective* comes handy. The book is recommended to all who seek knowledge especially Africans and students of security and strategic studies as well as policy makers.

Reference

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Bibliographical Note

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