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CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF HERDSMEN ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper submits that there exist multiple dimensions through which herdsmen attack in Nigeria could be perceived. Though traditionally seen as violence anchored on resource conflict, the attacks inhibit acts of terror and in some instances, religious extremism. Also, the word farming was substituted for the phrase “farming communities” because victims of herdsmen attacks are all not farmers. Importantly, this paper emphasizes the word “herdsmen” in place of the popular and ethnically charged phrase “Fulani- herdsmen” because, although predominantly of Fulani stock, not all herdsmen are ethnic Fulani. There is a perception that the rising state of these attacks is nothing other than a conspiracy by some influential forces within the country, and in the opinion of others the attacks embeds acts of criminality. This paper argues that beyond the perception of resource conflict, issues of terrorism, religious extremism, conspiracies and criminality are but new perspectives with which herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be understood; and within these perspectives lie various security challenges that require multiple strategic solutions. The researchers consulted several secondary and tertiary sources, especially newspaper reports.

Keywords: Security; Jihad; Terrorism; Resource Conflict; Herdsmen Violence; Conspiracy Theory; Criminality; Religious Extremism.

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1. Introduction

Herdsmen attacks since the 20th century had in most cases been anchored on resource - the fight for use, control and ownership of land and water resources. Thus, the issue is traditionally regarded as a conflict between herders and farmers, or broadly seen as that between herdsmen and farming communities. The rising states of these attacks and the human fatality record have raised questions across various sections of the Nigerian society, and the international community as well. Are these attacks by herdsmen beyond the issue of “fighting for resources use and control”? An academic

investigation into herdsmen violence in Nigeria reveals the multiple dimensions with which the issue of herdsmen attack could be perceived beyond the traditional perspective of resources conflict.

This paper argues that acts of terrorism, killings, religious extremism, criminality (as seen in reported cases of rape kidnapping and theft) and conspiracy theories are but new narratives through which herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be perceived. These multiple perceptive poses multiple negative security implications for the country. The paper therefore suggest that a solution to the issue of herdsmen attacks is beyond the provision of grazing routes, ranches and/or cattle colonies as suggested by the Nigerian government, but that requiring a combination of policy, diplomatic and security strategies geared towards its containment and resolve.

2. Who are Herdsmen? A History of Herdsmen in Nigeria

Herdsmen refer to a group of people involved in cattle, goat and sheep herding activities. They are socio economically pastoralist by behavior and occupation. In Nigeria and many parts of West Africa, they are predominantly of Fulani ethnic grouping, hence, the emergence of the phrase “Fulani Herdsmen”. According to David Levinson (1996) “one third of Fulani populations are pastoralist” thus making Fulani the largest herding ethnic group in the world. Herding is a cultural and socio economic part of the Fulani people. Estimated to be between 10 and 15 million in Nigeria, Fula, Fulbe, or Hilani (as they are also called), are culturally bonded by the Fulfulde language and religiously by Islam. Herdsmen (or Fulani) oral history opines that they are a group of people from Egypt, the Middle or Far East. Their migratory movement saw the first wave of Fulani settle around Mediterranean Africa and Mauritania. There, they mingled with the Berbers of North Africa (Richard, 2008:492; *See also* Ndukwe, 1996:9-17). From North Africa they moved south into the Senegambia region of West Africa by the 5th century (Skutch, 2005:474), and by the 15th century they had established their presence in what later became northern Nigeria. Herdsmen are predominantly of Fulani stock. They are a mixture of Arab, Berbers of North Africa and native West Africa people - mostly the Toucoulor, Wolof and Serer. According to Skutch (2005:474) both the language of, and contemporary Fulani people (sedentary and pastoralist) originates from the Senegambia region of West Africa.

Herdsmen occupy an east-west geographical expanse immediately below the Sahara Desert, spanning across the Sahel and just above the Savannah (swamp and rain forest) region of Africa (*See* Denver, 2015:31-32). Thus, they could be found in Mauritania, Central Africa Republic, Cameroun and in many countries of West Africa; especially Nigeria, where Fulani are regarded as the fourth largest ethnic group at an estimated population of 15 million. By the 16th century, Fulani presence, whether as sedentary or pastoralist, had been established in Nigeria by virtue of the expansion of influence into Rano (today Kano) by the Askia Mohammed Fulani Empire of Songhai. Later in 1808, another Fulani by name Usman Dan Fodio established, through a jihad, the Sokoto Caliphate which spanned across most parts of northern and partly central Nigeria. It must be noted that Pastoral Fulani or “Fulani Herdsmen” were not MIA – missing in action during the jihads. According to Stanton (2012:147-148) “Pastoral Fulani were the warring entities of the jihads, armed with horses and other artilleries of warfare”.

In Nigeria the group of people actively involved in herding activities are the Kanembu, Kiroya, Manga, Fulbe (Fulani) and Shuwa Arabs. Among these groups, the Fulani are the largest owners of livestock in Nigeria accounting for about 90% of the nation's stock (Abbas, 2009:331). This implies that herding activities in Nigeria is dominated by Fulani. Hence, many refer to herdsman with the ethnical phrase "Fulani herdsman". Their herding activities, just like their 15th century eastward search for pasture is strategic. While some have argued that Herdsman transhumance (pastoral) activities are simply for tax evasion, avoidance of harsh climatic conditions; dangerous cattle diseases and a form of cheap economic production, others have argued it to be associated with their culture. These multiple factors, including environmental and demographic changes, forces an annual northwest - southeastern transhumant movement in search of pasture which is essential for their survival -human and cattle. In recent times, their socio-economic activities have increasingly culminated in violent conflicts with the economic activities of several farming communities, and the rising state of its occurrence, destruction and human fatality recorded, is in contemporary Nigeria, an issue of national security concern.

3. A Brief Account of Herdsman Attacks in Nigeria

The rising state of herdsman attacks, and the destruction caused, including human displacement and fatality record, poses huge security challenges to the Nigerian state. Since the turn of the first decade of the 21st century, violent attacks by herdsman have been on the increase. In 2013 Herdsman were responsible for the death of over 80 people, and in 2014, an estimated 1,200 persons died as a result of herdsman attacks (Adeyemo, 2018). Their largest attack in 2014 witnessed the death of about 200 persons in Zamfara state (Rose Buchanan, 2015), while in 2015, Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked herdsman as the world's fourth deadliest militant group for having been responsible for about 1,229 human fatality in 2014 (Oli, Ibekwe & Nwakwo, 2018:31).

Herdsman attacks in the last 3 years resulted in the death of about 525 persons between June 2015 and January 2016; not less than 1,700 deaths in 2017; and no fewer than 1750 human fatality in the first six months of 2018; totaling 5,275 human fatality between June 2015 and June 2018 (The Nigerian Voice, 2018). The significance of the above is not simply the alarming number of the death recorded annually but more of the rising number of annual human fatality record as a result of these attacks. For instance, conflict resulting from cattle grazing accounted for 35% of all recorded crisis of 1991 and 2005 (Ademola, 2014: 4-5). In 2016 alone, herdsman attacks were responsible for almost 50% of recorded deaths in Nigeria (GTI special report 2017: 24). The rising human fatality caused by Herdsman attacks increased in 2018 as Amnesty International put the figure at 1,813 recorded deaths between January and August 2018 (Tokunbo& Juliana, 2018).

The above does raise concerns and questions regarding the underlying causes of Herdsman attacks. For one, the violence is provoked by an overlap of farming activities into grazing fields. But beyond the above, other factored causes according to Oli, Ibekwe & Nwakwo (2018: 30&34) include but are not limited to: unavailability of sufficient resources - land and water, aged-long disagreement between both group, lack of access to grazing fields by herdsman, changing climatic condition and increased urbanization. These causative factors were agreed upon by Ajibefun (2018:136) who on his part included cattle rustling, indiscriminate bush burning and harassment of herdsman by youths of farming communities as other identified reasons for such aggression.

The above causative factors to well-meaning and concerned Nigerians do not categorically justify the destruction, displacement and human fatality caused by herdsmen attacks.

These attacks, it seems, are beyond resource conflict provoked by ecological and demographic changes. Leaders of some of the affected farming communities perceive these attacks as that which is religiously motivated, considering the fact that herdsmen are predominantly Muslims and they oftentimes attack Christians' worship centers, leaders, worshippers and communities (*See Ademola, 2014:14; Kaley& Benjamin 2017*). Some view it as an attempt at ethnic cleansing. Statements from victims, communities and political leaders seems to lend credence to a grand conspiracy against affected farming communities (*See Adamu& Ben, 2017:3,4,14-22*). Due to such perceptions, there are oftentimes reported cases of reprisal attacks by farming communities. Between 2015 and 2017 for instance, there were seven reported cases of reprisal attacks which resulted in the death of 61 persons. To the extent that there exist conflicting interest anchored on resource use, and aggression on both side provoked by these conflicting interest, the issue of Herdsmen attacks could rightly be viewed as a conflict. However, when one examines the frequency, dexterity and human fatality record of Herdsmen attacks as compared to the reprisal attacks by farming communities, the issue of "conflict" becomes questionable. Nevertheless, Herdsmen attacks are anchored on resource conflict but one in which its violence is overwhelmingly perpetuated by one side of the aggrieved - herdsmen.

It seems emphasizes on these attacks being perceived as resource conflicts is partly responsible for the Nigerian government kid-glove approach to the security challenge they pose to the Nigerian state. In all reported cases, the Nigerian government dismisses Herdsmen attacks as nothing other than community clash, resource conflict, criminal activities or political conspiracy by opposition elements. Thus, attacks that inhibit terror killings, religious violence, and going by the submission of the Nigeria government, resource conflict, acts of criminality and political conspiracies, are not given the proactive seriousness that they require – the effect of which are negatively numerous. Reprisal attacks, "loss of human and animal lives, displacement of persons, destructions of properties, wide spread anti-Fulani sentiments" (Oli, Ibekwe&Nwakwo, 2018:34), deduction in output and income of farmers and herders, scarcity of live stocks and agricultural products, mutual suspicion between herdsmen and farming communities that destroys social relation, reported cases of rape, sexual harassment of women, proliferation of small and light weapons (Ajibefun, 2018:136&137) and criminal activities such as kidnapping and theft are negative effects of herdsmen attacks.

Why the above effect border on an individual citizen, the state suffers loss of revenue, national disunity, budgeting for the maintenance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps, loss of human capital, disruption of national socio-religious integration progress and damage to the country's international image. These are but a few negative effects of Herdsmen attacks. Nigeria as a country is ranked 148 out of 163 countries based on the 2017 Global Peace Index, "and 3rd most terrorized country in the world" (Ukpong, 2017). The point to note is that many (if not all) of these effects pose either real or potential security threats to the Nigerian state. And these security threats are embedded in the multiple perspectives through which herdsmen attacks could be perceived - terrorism, religious extremism, resources conflicts, criminality and conspiracy theory.

4. Contending Perspectives on Herdsmen Attacks

One must note that the issue of Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria is not solely anchored on the aged long battle for resource use and control between herders and farmers. To narrow the issue to the above is to be oblivious of the new dimensions of these attacks. Terror acts, religious killings, criminal activities and political conspiracies are but new narratives that have changed public perceptions on Herdsmen attacks. In fact, they, alongside the traditional perception of resource conflicts, are the perspective through which herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be understood.

4.1. Terrorism: Herdsmen Attacks as “Acts of Terror”

There is no universal definition attributable to the concept to terrorism. Thus, various scholars, institutions and governments differ in their definitions on the subject matter. According to the US Department of Defense (USDD) “terrorism is the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear, and coerce or intimidate government or societies in the pursuit of (un)defined objectives” (Omale 2013:96-97). The European Union (EU) defined the concept as “Violence aimed at intimidating a population, and that which aims to compel a government or an organization to act or abstain from any act (Official Journal of the European Communities, 2002:4). For the international unifying body - the United Nations (UN) “terrorism is any act intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, with the purpose of intimidating a population, compelling a government or an international organization to act or abstain from acting” (UNCHR, July 2008:5&6). The definitions of the USDD, EU and UN contain common elements with which terrorism could be understood, such as: terrorism is violence oriented; it (is premeditated to) cause death or harm; it is perpetrated to intimidate and/or instill fear; it aims to force a reaction; and terrorism is an act, and not a cause.

From the above, it therefore suffices to say that terrorism is any act of premeditated violence, aimed to intimidate, cause fear and death to a populace, in order to force a public, institutional and/or governmental reaction.

The contention on the definition of terrorism is usually anchored on the argument that “one man’s terrorism is another man’s patriotism” (Adamu& Ben 2017:8). According to Aderonke (2015:130) the reason for the above is because history is replete with too many precedents of organizations and individuals who were labeled terrorists but eventually evolved to become respected leaders of government. Overtime, this has strengthened the conviction of individuals and groups that ‘Acts of Terror’ can be employed as a strategy channeled towards the propagation of a cause however defined. Terrorism is a strategy with which group grievances or the cause they pursue could be aired, propagated or achieved. Other strategies include strikes, debates, sit-ins, boycotts, protest and demonstration. Acclaimed freedom fighters, patriots or discontent elements are at liberty to employ any of these, or device new strategies in their agitation for a cause. But if ‘Acts of Terror’ i.e. terrorism be their desired strategy, then such a group is by virtue of its act (or activities), a terrorist group.

Terrorism is not defined by the nature of a group or the legitimacy of the cause it pursue or grievances held. It is defined by the acts, activities or action of the group. By virtue of being referred to as “Acts of Terror” the emphasis is on the actions of the group and not the cause the

group pursues. Acts of Terror are discernable and definitive, and the employment of such acts makes any group a terrorist entity, whether or not its cause is just. It therefore suffices to state that the name - herdsmen, their nature of herding and the legitimacy of their cause i.e a fight for resource use and control is relegated to the domain of terrorism because their activities or attacks reflects acts of terror. Put succinctly, Herdsmen attacks reflects all identified elements of terrorism: they are violence oriented acts that causes death or harm, intimidation, and instill fear in a populace in other to alter or maintain the status quo, and force a reaction. Their wanton killings are aimed at intimidating and instilling fear among farming communities, and the larger Nigeria public is not in exclusivity. Herdsmen attacks are violent and have caused the deaths of thousands of Nigerians. In 2018, no fewer than, 1,750 Nigerians died as a result of various Herdsmen attacks, and within the last three years (2016 - June 2018) the human fatality record totaled 5,275. These violent acts of terror have since the beginning of 2015 become a monthly affair. Gbenro and Jesusegun (2016) provide a statistic from May 2015 to May 2016 as follows:

97 persons died as a result of herdsmen attacks in May 2015; 368, 635, 431, 267 and 276 persons died from their attacks in June, July, August, September and October respectively; 81 deaths occurred in November and 136 human fatality were recorded in December 2015; while between January and June 2016, the death toll were 104, 90, 26, 43 and 12 respectively”.

The above figures were what prompted the GTI to submit in 2016 that herdsmen were the fourth deadliest terror organization in the world behind ISIL, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda. Evidently, the above facts and stats reveal acts of terror killing aimed at intimidating and causing fear within the Nigerian community. Resource conflicts or communal clashes are not monthly violence of wanton killings. Like in 2015, Herdsmen attacks in 2018 were a monthly occurrences, reflecting a violence beyond the normal nature of communal clashes or resource conflicts, but one within the domain of terrorism, causing the deaths of many Nigerians, and aimed at intimidating, instilling fear and/or altering the resource status quo of the country, to which reactions from the Nigerian government have been abysmal.

Aderonke (2015:130) argued that “a group could have a perfectly beautiful cause (or a legitimate grievance), but if the group perpetrates terror acts, it is terrorism regardless”. The name, location, grievance, nature, ethno-religious identity, cause pursued, objectives and acclaimed imagery of a group is not important in the discourse of identifying terrorist group. What is however important are the activities of the group. Terrorism is not labeled on a group based on what it (dis)claims to be but on what it actually does; it is not a cause but an act. If a group (herdsmen) claims to pursue a just cause of fighting for resource control - land and water, but engages in acts of terror, then it is simply a terrorist group covered in the flowery garb of “fighting a legitimate cause”. What is just about premeditated monthly killing of the innocent in the pursuit of a just cause? The answer is obvious. Herdsmen attacks are aimed to intimidate, strike fear, cause deaths and force government reaction. Such acts of terror de-legitimizes the justification of their cause, thus transforming their imagery as a group to being perceived as a terrorist organization.

In 2015 a radical by name HammaduKoulfa established in Mali, an Islamic fundamentalist group known as the Macina Liberation Front – FLM *i.e* Front de Liberation du Macina and his approach was to rally nomadic Fulani Herdsmen to its cause by fusing Islamic fundamentalism to the

Sahelean pastoralist grievances (Kelley & Benjamin, 2017). Since 2015 there has been an upsurge in Herdsmen attacks across the West African region and Nigeria in particular.

4.2. Herdsmen Attacks: Religious Extremism or Jihadism?

They asked me to recite the Islamic article of faith...after reciting the shahadah and fatiha, I was set free by the herders - Abubakar Adamu (a pseudonym name for a victim of herdsmen attack). Excerpt from Adamu & Ben, "Nigeria: Benue State under the Shadow of Terrorism", 2017:21-23.

Given the historical account of Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad, and the religious coloration of herdsmen attacks i.e. the perception that Muslim herders attack predominantly Christian farming communities, many have referred to herdsmen activities as a jihad, and herdsmen as jihadists. The Benue state Governor (Duru, 2018), Prof Wole Soyinka (Adekoya, 2018), the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and scholars such as Adamu & Ben (2017:3, 4, 14-22) did argue that herdsmen attacks were a declaration of Jihad. In their 2018 report, The Nigerian Voice (TVN) made use of the phrase "Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen" to buttress their argument that herdsmen attacks are targeted at Christian population. A historical evaluation of some Jihads such as the jihads against the crusades (11th - 14th AD); Sori and Karonke Ali in Guinea (1720s); the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in northern Nigeria (1804); Seku Ahmadu in Mali (1818) but to mention a few, all had common elements which betray the notion that herdsmen are on a jihad mission.

First, they were borne out of a collective effort of the Muslim community - sedentary and pastoralist. Two, there were usually a call or rally cry for support from the Muslim community. Thirdly, they aim to establish as an end result a Muslim society. Forth and importantly, they all had identifiable leaders. But in the case of herdsmen, they do not have an identifiable leader, nor have they made a rally cry for support against "identified infidels." Their claim is 'fight for resource control' and not the establishment of an Islamic society. Categorically, the elements of a jihad are lacking with regards to Herdsmen attacks. Thus, they are not Jihadists, nor do they engage in any acclaimed Jihad. At worse, they are religious extremist, and this owes largely to the nature and targets of some of their attacks.

The issue of Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be perceived from a standpoint of religious extremism. There exist numerous accounts of herdsmen attacks on Christian worship centers, leaders, and in communities that are predominantly Christian. Eighty-three of the one hundred and eleven (83 of 111) studied cases of Herdsmen attacks in 2014 occurred in Benue, (southern) Kaduna, Plateau, Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa states, and in these locations are numerous communities populated with a religious identity (Christianity) which is at variance with the religion of herdsmen which is Islam (Philip Ademola, 2014:14). More so, these places form the impermeable fringes for the 1804 jihadists and therefore constituted the traditional boundary between Muslim north (caliphate) and Christian south.

In 2018, states most hit were Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and (southern) Kaduna which are overwhelmingly Christian territories. Thus, Kaley & Benjamin (2017) buttressed the above by stating that "herdsmen - farming communities' violence in Nigeria is deepened by Muslim - Christian differences". On the 24th of April 2018, herdsmen attacked Ayar - Mbalom village in Gwer East of Benue state, killing seventeen worshippers and two priests. On the 13th of May 2013,

herdsmen were reported to have attacked a Christian burial ceremony in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue state which left forty-two persons dead. When both events were analyzed, the question left in the minds of many concerned Nigerians was “do such attacks not betray any notion of “a fight for resource control”? Although, some herders could be genuinely industrious, some elements within the bunch are obviously religious extremists. According to Reverend Emmanuel Atsue and confirmed by police reports, herdsmen shot at and injured Reverend Cornelius Pohah and beat up Stephen Bakari, stating the reason for the attack as being that the former stopped them from grazing at the seminary ground. Such unprovoked violence on religious leaders, priests and worshippers could simply be interpreted as religious extremism.

The religious extremism of herdsmen, it seems, is not targeted at Christians alone. On the 15th of May 2018, the Nigerian police reported that “gunmen believed to be herdsmen opened fire on Muslim worshippers” in Etogi village of Niger state, killing twenty one worshippers, including the Imam of the mosque” (Opara, 2017). Religious extremism in this case is regarded as an eccentric, unreasonable and reckless violence motivated by religious adherents against non-adherents. The above therefore breeds numerous interpretations. For one, herdsmen attacks could have spurred a new form of reprisal attacks - in this case, the attack on the mosque could have been perpetrated by Christians covered in the flowery garb of herdsmen(?) It could be that the herders in question are Christians (although unpopular, but not impossible). It has been stated already that herdsmen are all not ethnic Fulani. Likewise same, not all herdsmen are Muslims. A few are "pagans" and the possibility of a Christian herder exists. It is therefore not clear who or what group perpetrated the mosque attack, the argument herein is that whoever they were, religious consideration were not exclusive in their considerations.

When mass killings occur in schools, residential areas, markets places, parks, and/or in government institutions, they are usually accorded multiple narratives. But whenever they occur in religious centers, and the victim’s religious coloration are at variant with those of its perpetrators, there is usually only one interpretation for such attacks - religious motivated violence; and that, it seems, is what herdsmen attacks represent.

Based on reported evidence, Christians and Christian worship centers and communities have been the worst hit by Herdsmen attacks. Adamu and Ben (2017:22) provided an account of how “Abubakar Adamu (a muslim victim of Herdsmen attack) was set free after he recited the shahadah and fatiha (Islamic article of faith and Quranic first verse). Thus, he submitted base on the said interview that “herdsmen are Muslims and their victim are overwhelmingly Christians and they shout “Allahu Akbar” during their attacks. The shout of Allahu Akbar during some herdsmen attacks, alongside other evidence, lend credence to a religious motivated violence. In summary: Some elements within the bunch of Herdsmen are religious extremist. In their attacks on farming communities, these lots are motivated by religious differences. They are not jihadists; at most, some of their attacks are borne out of religious extremism.

4.3. Herdsmen Attacks as Resource Conflict

Herdsmen attacks as a ‘fight for resource control’ is anchored on two resources; land and water, and influenced by two factors; ecology and demography. With regards to ecological reasons, the increased desertification of the Sahara and Sahel region of Africa has resulted in large influx of

herders and their cattle down south in the savanna region. This translates to increase in human population, number of cattle and grazing activities in a region undergoing similar changes but demographic in nature. The population growth of the Savannah region of Africa have been on the increase and so has been the need for land resources to cater for this increasing population growth. Thus, the conflict is triggered as a result of grazing routes being used for farming; and the farmlands being grazed upon by marching herds. Conroy (2018:6) used the phrase “Eco-violence” to describe the nature of the conflict. According to him, “eco-violence is anchored on simple-scarcity, group identity and relative deprivation conflicts, and Herdsmen attacks reflect all the above mentioned i.e. they occur as an effect of scarcity in available resources - land and water; group identity grievances with respect to threat to historical and cultural trace to land; and a sense of deprivation in the Savannah regions of Africa by virtue of being denied easy access to land for their grazing herds.

There is usually an emotional attachment oftentimes transmitted in confrontations, conflicts, and in some cases violence, when ownership and use of land resources are questioned. The importance surrounding land cannot be over emphasized. Arab-Israeli conflict (1948 – to present) is a classic example that buttresses this argument. Men are usually willing to die in their quest to acquire or protect land or water resources. Aside its economic benefits for production, it serves as a means of identification and heritage, especially for an African who usually is attached to his ancestry through such an essential - land. An African man without an ancestral homeland is regarded as a ‘historical orphan or cultural bastard’. Thus, every man attaches his origin to a particular land for pride, identity and socio-economic survival and all three are threatened when confronted with claims of being foreign settlers as herdsmen are labeled in several farming communities especially in the middle belt, to which violence and terror attacks have been employed by these herders in other to maintain or alter the status quo to their advantage. In the words of SalehAlhassan, national secretary of Miyetti Allah KautalHore:

We know our root. If you see us in the bushes don’t think we don’t have our history and particularly in the Benue. We are challenging the Tiv people. We were there in the Benue valley before them, before they moved to the Benue valley. So, they met the pastoralist there. This is a struggle for natural resources (Adanikin, 2017)

Evidently, some herdsmen lay claim to lands they graze upon and to them, farming on these acclaimed lands is deemed as providing food for their cattle and if denied, a call for violence. Put perfectly by a pastoralist from plateau state:

The encroachment of grazing field and routes by farmers is a call for war...our herds is our life and we are worthless without our cattle. Whenever we turn we find the land reserved for our cattle to feast, taken over by farmers...it becomes difficult for our herd to move without veering into crop field. Once that happens the farmer confronts us and we have no option but to fight back (Conroy, 2018:7).

Resource conflict is the root cause of Herdsmen attacks as suggested by the above. This conflict for resources has resulted in the death of thousands of Nigerians. Unfortunately for the country, without proactive measures being employed, it seems the violent attacks will linger for a lengthy

period of time, because the demographic, climatologic and ecological factors that have influenced the conflict are still aggressively escalating.

The Sahara desert already occupies 35% of landmass in Nigeria, and is creeping further south at the rate of 0.6% kilometer a year. At the same time, deforestation is taking place at 3.5% per year (Conroy, 2018:23). This translate to Nigeria losing about 2,168 square kilometers of cattle rangeland and crop land every year to desertification, posing serious threats to the livelihood of about 40 million people (Olasupo, 2013). More so, the Sudano - Sahelean region of Nigeria have experienced a 3 - 4% decrease in rainfall per decade since the beginning of the 19th century; thus, the number of rainy days in the core north of Nigeria have decreased from 150 to 120 in the last 50 years, consequently destroying 20% of crop yield (Conroy 2018:23). Consequently, “there has been a 450% increase in sand dunes across northern Nigeria, with an estimated two-third i.e 2/3 of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara states on the verge of becoming deserts or semi deserts before the end of the 21st century. Excluding Kaduna and including Adamawa to the above list of states, about 35% of the land that was cultivated fifty years ago in these states are no longer arable, thereby threatening the livelihood of 15 million pastoralists” (Conroy, 2018:23-24). Thus, there is increased movement in search for pasture, which has consequently triggered violence over land and water resources.

All of the above implies that the issue of scarcity of resources affects both sides of the divide - herders and farming communities. But worst hit by this problem is the Sahalean region of West Africa i.e. below the Sahara down into northern Nigeria. Consequently, the middle belt which is home to the highlands of Jos-Plateau (and Adamawa plateau); regions that rises about 5,000 feet above sea level and thus provides a temperate climatic condition for pastoral cattle rearing have become the hotspots of herdsmen attacks due to the pasture and adequate weather conditions they provide. On this note and at this juncture, it is evidently safe to submit that Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria is a question of resource conflict influenced by ecological, demographical and climatologic factors attributable to the changing times of our society.

4.4. Herdsmen Attacks as Acts of Criminality

Some herdsmen attacks have criminal bearings whenever they occur. This is a new trend in herdsmen violence across Nigeria wherein criminal reports of kidnapping, rape, extortion, and theft have become activities associated with herdsmen attacks within the country. These criminal attacks have oftentimes resulted in the death of many Nigerians to which while debunking the assertion that herdsmen were terrorists, the Nigerian Minister for Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammed argued that “rather than terrorism, herdsmen were criminals because their activities suggest criminality” (Bakare, 2017). This position was reiterated by the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, GerbaShehu who stated in an interview on Channels TV that “Fulani herdsmen were criminals and not terrorists (Ogbonna, 2017). Put aptly by the Governor of Kebbi state, H. E. AbubakarAtikuBagudu, “not all Fulani herdsmen are criminals...Many are legitimate and peaceful herders, while some few are criminals (Lawal, 2018). There seem to be a consensus among government officials that rather than terrorists, herdsmen are criminals. It has been argued by this paper that some herdsmen are terrorists by virtue of their acts. So also, are some elements within the bunch criminals by virtue of their engagement in criminal activities.

The reason for this criminal tag is not farfetched. “Pastoralists (Herdsmen) engage in the raping of women, abduction and killing of farmers; and they have taken to Kidnapping and arm robbery activities on highway”, Ahmed (2018:42) had argued. The Nigerian Voice 2nd July 2018 report pointed out that “Herdsmen attacks have resulted in the death of about 160 travelers and other road users in Nigeria”, while their attack in Lagelu area of Oyo state resulted in the theft of 500,000 cash (Idowu&Okunola, 2017:50). In reaction to the criminal activities of Herdsmen in Nigeria, the national secretary of Miyelti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) did state in an interview on Channels TV that herdsmen who made use of lethal weapons such as guns to attack and kill farmers are criminals and not members of MACBAN. In his words:

I lead an Association which looks after the lives of “legitimate pastoralist”. As far as we are concerned, whoever handles a dangerous weapon is never and will never be “our member” and we consider him to be “a criminal” (Toromade, 2018)

The above statement by the national secretary of the largest umbrella body of herdsmen in Nigeria did reveal three important factors. That for one, there exist illegitimate pastoralists in Nigeria. Secondly those illegitimate herdsmen are not members of MACBAN (because to him, the association embodies only legitimate herders). And thirdly, those illegitimate herders are criminals by virtue of their gun wielding criminal activities. It must be categorically stated that members of MACBAN, the acclaimed legitimate umbrella body of herdsmen oftentimes engage in violent attacks. The above is proven by the statement of the chairman of the association - north central zone of Nigeria, Danladi Ciroma who in defense of a suspected herdsman attack in Plateau did state that “those violent attacks are retaliatory...those who carried out these attacks must be on revenge mission because some cows were rustled” (Friday, 2018). The simple interpretation of the above statement is that ‘legitimate’ MACBAN herders do engage in violent (retaliatory) attacks.

With regards to lay of claims to violence and criminality, on the 28th of June 2018, Mallam Mohammed Hussein, Chairman of Nassarawa state branch of MACBAN accused Operation Whirl Stroke (OPSL) of extra-judicial killings of some member herdsmen and hundreds of cattle. But reacting to the above claim, the Nigerian Army director of information, Brigadier General John Agim countered the above by stating that:

On the 26th of June 2018 (i.e. 2 days before the accusation) some armed militia Herdsmen attacked and killed two soldiers after a cordon and search operation at a suspected Herdsmen militia camp at Bakinkota village, Keana LGA, Nassarawa..... OPWS troop’s recovered 1 AK47 rifle fitted with magazine, 2 locally made gun, 1 pistol, 1 axe and 800 rounds of 7.62 mm special. This was a criminal group that our team was able to destroy their camp. For the chairman of MACBAN, Nassarawa to identify and associate them as members begs for questions that demand answers (Nseyen, 2018).

From the above evidence several conclusions can be deduced. For one, MACBAN did lay claim to the military labeled criminals as being members of the association. That the accused individuals found with guns and other deadly weapons were indeed herders, criminals and members of MACBAN as claimed. Evidently, some herdsmen are criminals by virtue of their activities of rape, kidnapping, robbery and theft. Their criminally oriented attacks have resulted in the deaths and loss of properties of many Nigerians. While It could be that criminal elements parade themselves

as herdsmen in their bid to perpetrate crimes. Bottom-line is that criminality is but a perspective with which Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria could be understood, and it does pose security threats to the citizenry of the country.

4.5. Herdsmen Attacks and the Question of Conspiracy

Conspiracy refers to a set of secret plans by an individual or group to do something harmful. According to Michael Barkum (2003:3-4) conspiracy theories anchor on the belief that “nothing happens by accident and there is usually a hidden truth to every event”. A conspiracy theory therefore is a series of hypotheses that requires concrete evidence to become factual truths; they fade away if not provided, but have been the basis of some of humanity greatest discoveries and insight (The Book of Life, 2018). Put simply, a conspiracy theory is a series of hypotheses lacking concrete evidence to become factual truths of general acceptance, although they are perceived to be true by those who vent them. Herdsmen attacks in Nigeria are awash with all manner of conspiracy theories - religious, ethnic and political. In the words of Collins & Vincent (2018:6):

The conflict has been politicized along ethnic, tribal, cultural, and religious lines. The herders are predominantly pastoral Muslims (believed to be dominantly Fulani) and the farming communities are native non-Muslims; the government at the center and some states that share similar identities with the former (i.e. Muslim-Fulani herdsmen) are accused of tacit support for the herders who engage in these marauding attacks.

4.5.1. Ethnic Conspiracy

The conspiracy in this regard lies in the perception that herdsmen are predominantly Fulani and the victims of their attacks are usually non-Fulani; the president of the country (MuhammaduBuhari) is by ethnicity, a Fulani man and his security architecture which has failed to address the situation is predominantly Fulani. More so, the patrons of Herdsmen’s largest umbrella body (MACBAN) are Fulani, including the president who owns a herd and was once the patron of MACBAN. Therefore, it is assumed that there is an ethnic conspiracy by the Fulanis, from top to the herders, to use violence to strike fear among these farming communities in order to lay claim to land resources. Reverend Solomon (a serving priest in Benue state), argued that there is a conspiracy to establish Fulani occupation of Benue state (Adamu& Ben, 2017:15). “Mr. President, it seems, is sympathetic to the activities of his kinsmen going by his handling of the Herdsmen killings in the country” Reverend Ben Ubeh buttressed (Mkom, 2018). The government body language and inability to address the issue have given room for the development of such theories and importantly, reprisal attacks. Today, several communities resort to seeking justice through reprisal attacks – a trend that witnessed Bachama youths in Taraba state mistakenly attack a Hausa community. The above clearly reflects the rally cry of former minister of defense, Lt. Gen. TY Danjuma who lamented that there exists a conspiracy between the Nigerian military and killer herdsmen aimed at ethnic cleansing. Therefore, the people must rise to protect themselves. In his words, “You must rise to protect yourselves from these people, if you depend on the Arm Forces to protect you, you will all die. This ethnic cleansing must stop.... These killers have been protected by the military, they cover them and you must be watchful to guide and protect yourselves” (John, 2018). As it stands, the Fulani as an ethnic identity have been extremely securitized and are “endangered species” within and around areas most hit by the herdsmen violence. Obviously, the

security implication is that if not managed efficiently herdsmen conflict has the potential to set-off, within the country, an ethnic crisis with grave security consequences.

4.5.2. *Religious Conspiracy*

The religion conspiracy stems from the fact that Herdsmen are predominantly Muslims and their victims, predominantly Christian farming communities. The leadership of MACBAN is dominantly Muslim and so is the outlook of the presidency and his security appointees. Therefore, it is assumed that the crisis is a religious agenda to force through the “unfinished business” of Usmandan Fadio in 1804. While Adamu & Ben (2017:15) argue similarly that the attacks, it appears, goes beyond the issue of contestation over land and grazing fields and included a designed plan to evict and occupy “Christian” populated communities and villages, the chairman of National Christian Elders Forum (NCEF), Solomon Asemota puts it simply as “the federal government plan to setup ranches across central and southern Nigeria was a stealth “jihad” to take over lands belonging to other Nigerians and give them to herdsmen who would subsequently appoint Emirs and claim ownership of the land” (Adepegba, 2018 *See also* the view of Reverend Ben Ubeh in Mkom, 2018).

Religious conspiracy with regards to Herdsmen attacks is not only an emanation of the religious coloration of both divide and the disproportionate killings thereof, but also stems from statement credited to leaders of northern Muslim extraction, top among which was that credited to Sir Ahmadu Bello (Sarduna Sokoto and Premier of Northern Nigeria during the First Republic) where he allegedly stated on 12th of October 1960 that:

The new nation Nigeria would be an estate of our great grandfather Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities in the north as willing tools and the south as a conquered territory and never allow them to have control over their future (Fani-Kayode, 2014).

Although the context and/or conditions which motivated the above statement are not the focus of this work, the statement has become a ‘truthful gossip’ that has been used as a tool by the religious conspiracy theoreticians. Similarly, the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari is alleged to have (at a seminar organized by the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria and hosted at Kaduna in August 2001) stated that “I will continue to openly and inside me show total commitment to the Sharia movement sweeping all over the country; God willing we will not stop until it is totally implemented all over the country” (Oyewole, December 2014; *See also* Saxone Akhaine, 2007). The naïve interpretation is that the president committed himself to the struggle for the implementation of Sharia, and that Muslims should vote individuals that can help ensure its implementation.

As already mentioned, conspiracy theories do not emerge in a vacuum. Usually, there are series of acclaimed evidence and hypothesis to back the conspiracy. In this case, the religious nature of herdsmen being Muslims; the religious nature of their victims being predominantly Christians; the alleged statement of Sir Ahmadu Bello and President Buhari among others, are generated hypotheses to claim of a religious conspiracy. Sometimes careless statements made by any leader could be taken to be factual. For instance, some would add the 1977 statement credited to

Muhammad Ribadu (who went on to become a minister during the 1979-83 NPN government of the second republic), that “the Quran would have to be dipped in the Atlantic Ocean before the jihad (of Usman Dan Fodio) could stop” (Ogbo, 2016; *See* Awolowo, 1947:51). Whether or not these statements were made by the correspondents is not the bone of contention here. The reality is that these statements have overtime come to nurture religious conspiracy theories held by many aggrieved. With some herdsmen attacks being motivated by religious extremism, the danger herein is that the Herdsmen issue could spiral a religious conflict if not addressed effectively on time. With fear and suspicion building between some sections of the country and the government at the Centre on one side, and between religious divides as another case study, herdsmen attacks have become an ‘insecurity trigger awaiting a pull’.

4.5.3. *Political Conspiracy*

The political conspiracy revolves around electoral, monetary and regional narratives. Electorally, it is seen by some northern and party (All Progressives Congress) elements as that which is sponsored by some southern and opposition party (Peoples Democratic Party) elements to discredit the government of President Buhari who is a Fulani Muslim seeking re-election. Thus, to them, herdsmen attacks are attempts to whoop the sentiment of Non-Muslims and other ethnic groups against his re-election. The above reeks off two major elements. First is the northern - southern divide and second is the ruling party-opposition party divide. While evidence of the ruling party – opposition party conspiracy is visible in the statement of the spokesperson of the president, Femi Adesina and that of the country’s Minister of Information, Alhaji Lai Mohammad who both argued that “the conflict is sponsored by opposition forces”, the northern – southern conspiracy was aptly presented by the spokesperson of the Northern Elder Forum (NEF), Prof. Ango Abdullah who described herdsmen killings in the Middle Belt as “religious and political agenda to split the north... Sponsored by some respected people from the southern part of the country.... And Fulani herdsmen are their tool”. He went further to submit that “we saw this when Boko Haram was on ground, they said the northerners created the sect to disrupt former President Goodluck Jonathan’s government...who was from the south” (Olowolagba, 2018; Ahmed, 2018:54). The above is clear in its interpretation. It is thus, assumed that herdsmen attacks are sponsored attempts by some southern elements to discredit the government of a northerner because it was alleged that the Boko Haram security threat was a northern conspiracy against a southern president.

With regards to the monetary narrative of political conspiracy, Ahmed (2018: 54) argued that “not only are Herdsmen attacks assumed to be political weapon to either bring down or enthrone the president - Muhammad Buhari (depending on the position one adopts), it could be engineered for the purpose of monetary allocations, just as the amnesty situation of militancy later became”. The argument here is that issues of security in Nigeria have become a lucrative mechanism for unscrupulous elements to loot public funds. Pointers lay claim to the Niger Delta militancy and in recent times, the fight against terrorism - Boko Haram as avenues through which public funds have been looted, and Herdsmen attacks in their view is therefore nothing other than another lacuna for increased looting.

For sure, conspiracy is evidently a perspective with which to perceive Herdsmen attacks because several individuals, groups, communities, sections of the country and government officials view the attacks as nothing other than a conspired plot by some powerful forces against affected

communities. To these lots herdsmen attacks are religious, ethnic and political violence sponsored by some elements within the country, north or south of the divide, in other to advance their premeditated and unscrupulous agenda however defined. The security implication of these conspiracy theories is that they threaten the peace, oneness and unity of the country. That influential individuals, groups and communities view the issue as southern opposition plot against northern leadership, in response to the perceived northern sponsored Boko Haram terrorism against a past southern leadership is a huge cause for worry; that the country could, if the conspiracies are not managed effectively and these perception doused, divide along ethnic, religious and regional lines.

5. Security Implications of Herdsmen Attacks

Herdsmen attacks have resulted in massive loss of lives, displacement of people and the disruption of the occupational pursuit of many, all of which have impoverished victims of their attack, worsen the living conditions of those in IDP camps, affected environs and importantly, resulted in a significant decrease in agricultural (crop and livestock) production. About 6,000 persons have died in the last three years as a result of Herdsmen attacks. This constitute a huge loss in human capital, and when corroborated with reports of about 175,000 displaced persons in Benue state alone, the economic security of the country is further threatened (*See Agbakwuru, 2018*). There are about 20 government funded IDP camps in Nassarawa state, 8 in Benue state among several others established in various states across the country (*Ukumba, 2018*). Within these IDP camps, the living conditions of displaced persons are pitiable as issues of food insufficiency, unclean water, poor sanitation and hygiene, inadequate medication and several health challenges to women and children threatens to breed communicable diseases (*See Ihyongo, 2018*). When in April 2018 about 10,000 earlier reintegrated persons returned to various camps across Nassarawa state (*Abogonye, 2018*), the implication was invariably a decrease in food production and rising cost of goods influenced by their displacement and loss of occupational and economic productivity (*Duru, et al., 2018*). These negative effects of Herdsmen attacks, if not nipped in the bud could degenerate into socio-economic crises with grave security implications.

Reprisal attacks are increasingly being adopted by a few farming communities seeking justice they perceive cannot be given by the country's security apparatus. Anti-Fulani sentiments have spread across the country in recent times due to the fact that Herdsmen are predominantly Fulani. The Bachama reprisal attack on a Hausa community believed to be Fulani has the potential to spiral ethno-religious crises within the country if a counter attack became an option of the affected community. In Cross River state for instance, on the 6th of May 2018, two trucks conveying Fulani migrant sellers were intercepted and returned by communities after an alarm was raised by the "Hausa Settlers" in Ogoja. According to them "the new Fulanis will make life difficult and hostile for us to continue living in Ogoja peacefully because, it is possible they were driven away from wherever they came from because they were affiliated with killer Herdsmen" (*Edem, 2018*). These returnees were predominantly women, children and the elderly. They could themselves be fleeing from the backlash of herdsmen attacks. How can a country be said to be safe and secure when mutual fear exists amongst its citizens? Insecurity is synonymous with fear and as a result of herdsmen attacks, there is the fear of just anyone individuals who controls a herd of cattle, or is affiliated to same by virtue of ethnicity as was the above case.

Beyond all of the following security issues, kidnapping, rape, and theft have increasingly become elements of Herdsmen attacks. In fact, Herdsmen attacks, it seems, have provided a platform for acts of criminality to strife because they are oftentimes considered to be communal clashes by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Many terror and criminal atrocities associated with such attacks are not subjected to investigations, and the culprits are usually not brought to justice in fear of not wanting to escalate a communal clash. Thus the violence is further ember by the inaction of some Nigerians in good offices.

The effect of Herdsmen attacks with the most threatening consequence to national security is that posed by conspiracy theories - being that, Muslim Fulani herdsmen from core north of Nigeria, attack Christians and other ethnicities across the middle belt and south of the country, with the president and his security apparatus being sympathetic to their cause. Although the above conspiracy theory is a perception devoid of concrete evidence, it must be noted that perceptions are themselves truths to those who hold them to be true and in this context, one capable of dividing the country along religious and ethnic lines. When the national unity and integration of a country is threatened by real threats or conspiracy theories, the security of the country is not just threatened, but so also is the livewire of its very existence. Conspiracies are not generated in a vacuum and are the worst form of security threats. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 provides a historical lesson on the negative effects of conspiracy theories left unaddressed. The narrative began in 1990, but triggered four years later is one of the worst civil crisis in the history of mankind. The Nigerian society must produce superior arguments to these emerging conspiracies associated with herdsmen attacks. By virtue of some quarters of the Nigerian society perceiving the president of the country, Muhammadu Buhari and his security appointees as being unsympathetic to their safety, security and wellbeing, the October 11th, 2017 Nigerian military immunization exercise in the south south, south east and in some south western states generated rumors that monkey pox were to be injected in school children by the "Buhari Nigeria military", ultimately stirring panic that saw parents forcefully withdrawing their wards from schools (Njoku, et al., 2017; Atuma, 2017; Oluwole, 2017).

Ranging from acts of terror, rape, threats of ethno-religious crises, reduction in agricultural production output and theft, to the destruction of properties, displacement of people, kidnappings, fear, loss of human lives and threats to national unity and integration, herdsmen attacks in Nigeria poses negative security implications and threats that if not managed properly could plunge the country into an insecurity haven. Most dangerous of it all is the proliferation of small and light weapons which are mostly used for these attacks and concomitant reprisals. The fact also that the Boko Haram factions could disguise as herders and cause major havocs on farming communities is another source of worry. Apparently, the country might not withstand, for long, disturbances from herders, Boko Haram, militants and secessionist movements in the east all at once. It'sobvious that the state security is overstretched, hence, a need for the Nigerian state to make genuine peace with itself through justice, fairness and equity in its treatment of its citizens across the various ethnic divides.

6. Conclusion

Herdsmen attacks have been, and are still primarily anchored on resource conflicts i.e the fight for land and water resources. However, the nature and frequency of contemporary herdsmen attacks

have taken new dimensions and thus, could be viewed from multiple perspectives. Acts of terror i.e. terrorism is visibly evident in the nature of herdsmen attacks, with terrorism being seen as an act and not a cause. Herdsmen are not jihadists as suggested by some. This is because the nature of their attacks lacks common elements of jihadism. However, by virtue of their attacks on Christian worship centers, burials, leaders, communities and on rare occasions, on mosques and Muslim worshippers, they could be perceived as religious extremists. Their activities such as kidnapping, rape and theft are criminally oriented, while the rising state of their attacks have generated various conspiracy theories suggesting that the issue could be nothing other than a premeditated attempt by some influential individuals to achieve hidden agenda.

To view Herdsmen attacks solely as an issue of resource conflict is simply to trivialize other elements of their attacks such as acts of terror and criminality. To hammer on the subject as being terrorism is to argue on the application of military (anti-terrorism) approaches to addressing an issue that could require dialogue, restructuring and policy implementation with respect to land and water resources. If the attacks are simply criminalized and therefore deemed to require policing and intelligence, then the problem of resource conflict and terrorism will persist. To only perceive Herdsmen attacks from a religious standpoint i.e Muslim herders attacking Christian farming community is simply to emphasize religious tolerance and Alternative Dispute Resolution - ADR to the relegation of security approaches. And to view Herdsmen attacks as being nothing other than a conspiracy is to deny the existence of other real threats - terrorism, criminality, religious extremist killings and resource conflict. Herdsmen attacks are multidimensional in perspective. Their attacks reek of terrorism, criminality among others. The security implications thereof are multidimensional and so also the requisite strategies for its containment and resolution.

7. Recommendations

Solutions towards addressing Herdsmen attacks should reflect a holistic approach - military, dialogue, policy initiation and implementation, national reorientation (with respect to ethno-religious tolerance and understanding), media sanitization among others.

For one, the Nigeria government should ensure effective policing of troubled communities, and the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators of these attacks in order to deter future adherents and ensure the safety of Nigerians there within. In this regard, community policing should be effectively organized to serve as a mechanism for containing these attacks. Trustworthy vigilante groups, youths and retired security personnel can be (re)trained and assigned specific functions with regards to information gathering, intelligence reporting, among others.

Herdsmen must be educated to change from pastoralism to ranching, and government support could be provided through the provision of soft loans and start-up incentives.

Border security through the combination of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), customs, drug enforcement agencies, anti-graft agencies, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and importantly, the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF) must be improved upon. Personnel trainings and advance technological equipment must be provided, including improvements on surveillance, intelligence and patrol. The Nigerian government would do well to install visual sensors and motion detectors at strategic unnamed border routes for proper surveillance. This would help address issues of

illegal immigration by foreign herders and contain the importation of illegal weapons into the country.

The option of dialogue and ADR should be employed as well. Traditional, community and religious leaders should be provided a platform with which they can in-unity influence their subjects (or people) on the need for tolerance, peaceful co-existence and the avoidance of violence in conflict situation. Such platforms could be established across senatorial districts to serve as an alternative point for grievance reporting and dispute settlement.

The media should be cautioned on the use of inciting words in their reportage of herdsmen attacks. Their choice phrases such as “Fulani herdsmen”, “killer herdsmen”, “gun-carrying herdsmen”, “Fulani militias” among others raises fear and tension between Fulani people, herdsmen and other ethnicities across the country. Phrases with ethnic coloration and violence must therefore be avoided so as not to ember conspiracy theories and/or breed fear, tension and ethnic crises within the country. Peace oriented journalism must therefore be employed in reporting on Herdsmen attacks.

The Nigerian government must be seen prosecuting arrested perpetrators of herdsmen attacks for the purpose of deterring future culprits, as well as dousing the conspiracies of government tacit involvement. This would help resolve the issue of distrust between affected communities and the government on one side, and between various other ethnicities within the country.

Importantly, the Nigerian government must ensure it follows through on intelligence information with regards terror organizations beyond the borders of Nigeria; as far as Mali recruiting herdsmen as their foot soldiers to perpetrate crimes of terrorism. This option enables the Nigerian government identify on time, and arrest violent border-crossing herdsmen hiding under the cover of ECOWAS transhumance treaty.

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