CHINA-NIGERIA SECURITY COOPERATION POLICIES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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The current world order characterized by globalization signifies that states are not only preoccupied with the maintenance of coherence among their component units but also promoting external relations with other states in what is termed international relations. In the course of interaction, states establish various forms of cooperation which are commonly driven by policies. Security cooperation is one of such forms of cooperation.

China and Nigeria share a number of similarities such as being both classified as developing countries with large population; having similar defense policy thrust and regional relevance. Both are also littoral states with peculiar maritime security issues and have existent in their domains internal pro-insurgency groups pressing for forms of autonomy over territory and resources.[2] Overall, China is undoubtedly an influential power not only in Asia but in the world today while Nigeria's size, population and the availability of abundant natural resources makes her an influential power in Africa and a leading black nation in the world. From the foregoing, it is apparent that both countries could derive lots of benefit from close security cooperation.

China and Nigeria as strategic cooperating partners have established warm and cordial relations which have helped to further their bi-lateral interests and increased economic activities. However, there exists a gap in the area of military security cooperation. In this area, cooperation has so far been limited to diplomatic exchanges, training and few defense procurements. Hence,

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2 Information Office of the State Council PRC, Development and Progress in Xinjiang, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2009, p48.

this paper is intended to appraise the existing efforts at security cooperation between China and Nigeria. Accordingly, it shall highlight the history and trends in China-Nigeria relations and evaluate the security cooperation policies of both countries. It would further stress the challenges to existing security cooperation and then draw attention to the identified prospects inherent in the relationship. Finally, strategies for enhanced Sino-Nigeria security cooperation would be proposed.

HISTORY AND TRENDS IN CHINA-NIGERIA RELATIONS

China and Nigeria relations cannot be divorced from the relationship between China and Africa which commenced hundreds of years ago. Early contacts were the contacts were facilitated through trade routes by sea.[3] Even though the contacts were minimal, they laid the foundation for further direct and improved contacts that followed. In 1957 the Commercial Officer in the Embassy of China, in Cairo established unofficial trade links with Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania and Ethiopia.[4] The first official contact between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) was in October 1960 during the latter's independence celebration. The later part of the 20th century witnessed an increase in relations between both countries through the formal establishment of diplomatic relations in 1971 followed immediately with the reciprocal opening of diplomatic missions.

Consequently, bilateral military diplomatic relation was consummated in 1999 with the establishment of the Defense Sections in both embassies and attendant appointment of Defense Attachés (DAs).[5] Since then, the DA offices have provided good diplomatic platforms for military to military contacts and coordination. It is worthy to note that there have been regular visits of Ministers of Defense, Service Chiefs and other high level officers of the Armed Forces of Nigerian (AFN) to China. Furthermore, participants at the National Defense College, Nigeria have undertaken at least 6 geo-strategic study tours to China from 1996 to date. This makes it the most frequent of such visits to any country within similar time frame. On the

3 Yan Yu (Ed), China-Europe-Africa Cooperation: Chances and Challenges, Proceedings of the 6th Shanghai Workshop on Global Governance, SIIS/FES, Shanghai, 2008, pp 9-10.

4 http://www.businessdayonline.com/NG/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12108, Accessed Jan 2012.

5 Sulaiman Aliyu (Brig Gen), Nigeria's DA to China, Beijing, Unstructured interview by the Researcher, 18 March, 2012.

Chinese side, General Wu Quanxu, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and General Chi Haotian, Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, State Councilor and Defense Minister have both led delegations to Nigeria in June and September 2001.[6] These visits are usually geared towards initiating new or strengthening an existing aspect of security cooperation.

In recent times the Chinese government has facilitated the supply of arms and ammunitions, equipment and combat uniforms to Nigeria. Specifically, Nigeria purchased 12 x F-7NI fighter jets, 3 x FT-7NI trainers and about 200 patrol boats from China to enhance territorial integrity. These efforts have tremendously increased the effectiveness and efficiency of the AFN.[7]

The Sino-Nigeria Military cooperation has been very beneficial in the area of manpower development and technical assistance. It has facilitated training of a broad-spectrum of technical professionals in different military fields. So far over 390 personnel of the AFN have been trained in China.[8] Most of them have attained promotion to higher ranks in their respective Services. This attests to the appreciation of the training standard and quality of Chinese military institutions. There is no doubt that the high level interactions between China and Nigeria has fostered strategic exchanges and deepened understanding. This in turn has brought about enhanced bilateral strategic military security cooperation between both countries.

EVALUATION OF SECURITY COOPERATION POLICIES

Such reciprocal cooperation is enshrined in the Defense Policies of China and Nigeria which are similar in outlook. The goals and tasks of China's national defense in the new era are; to safeguard national sovereignty, security and interests of national development, maintaining social harmony and stability, accelerating the modernization of national defense and the armed forces and maintaining world peace and stability.[9] On Nigeria's part, the defense policy goals are; to protect Nigeria's sovevreignty, citizens, values, culture and territory against external threats, contribute to international peace and security, initiating bi-lateral and multi-lateral contacts and exchanges with

6 http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/focac/183429.htm, Accessed 21 March, 2012.

7 Sulaiman Aliyu (Brig Gen), Nigeria's DA to China, Op cit.

8 SIbid.

9 Information Office of the State Council, PRC, China's National Defense in 2010. Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2011, pp 10-13.

selected countries and participating in Peace Support missions sponsored by the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN).[10]

China conducts military exchanges with other countries following the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, develops cooperative military relations that are non-aligned, non-confrontational and not directed against any third party.[11] China adheres to the concepts of openness, pragmatism and cooperation, expands its participation in international security cooperation, strengthens strategic coordination and consultation with major powers and neighboring countries, enhances military exchanges and cooperation with developing countries, and takes part in UN peace-keeping operations, maritime escort, international counter-terrorism cooperation, and disaster relief operations.[12] Nigeria's security cooperation policy states that "Nigeria shall continue to enter into mutually beneficial bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements with friendly nations. These agreements, which shall be executed through mutually agreed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) shall include but not limited to military education assistance programme, personnel exchange programmes, training, exercises, equipment and logistics supply or refurbishment programmes. In addition, the nation shall establish security structures in conjunction with other countries for international peace and stability" .[13]

CHALLENGES TO EXISTING SECURITY COOPERATION

The relationship and security cooperation between China and Nigeria can be assessed as very cordial and the effort of the Chinese government must indeed be commended in this regard. However, the extent of cooperation has so far been limited to the areas of high level diplomatic exchanges, defense procurements and training while the overall Sino-Nigeria military security cooperation is observed to be skewed in terms of reciprocity particularly with respect to defense procurements and training exchanges. Certain challenges that could further militate against the actualization of these laudable expectations are as follows:

Poorly Prepared and Implemented MOU. It is observed that the security cooperation agreement between China and Nigeria is embedded in a MOU generally derived from the formal statements made and broad agreements

10 SNigeria's National Defence Policy Document, Government Press, Abuja, 2006, pp 22-24.

11 Information Office of the State Council, PRC, Op cit, pp13-14.

12 Ibid. pp 13-14.

13 Nigeria's National Defence Policy Document, Op cit, pp 26-27.

reached at different forums by persons in strategic leadership positions of both countries.[14] However, it does not appear as comprehensive enough when compared with similar MOUs between Nigeria and other states related with. The Sino-Nigeria MOU is often times characterized by ad-hoc requirements not necessarily backed by concrete policies that should drive the full extent of its implementation. Instances exist whereby the implementation processes of some agreed programs were negatively affected by the insensitive action of certain individuals or groups. Consequently, it is necessary to put in place measures to ensure that the security cooperation objectives of both sides are properly articulated and implemented for their mutual benefit.

Language Barrier. The language barrier has been a little drawback in the China/Nigeria military cooperation efforts. This is particularly evident at the operational/tactical levels where issues arise in the operation and maintenance of systems and equipment due to poor Chinese language knowledge. It is commendable to note that the Chinese government has taken a major step in this regard through the yearly offer of some language learning slots to Nigerian military personnel. However, more may need to be done to improve the situation by both sides due to the increasing need for their military personnel to be proficient in both the Chinese and English languages for better operation of current and future acquired Chinese military equipment. Consequently, there is the need for the promulgation of an aggressive policy that would ensure the dedicated teaching of the official languages to personnel of both countries through the establishment of language learning laboratories in designated military institutions as applicable.

Influence of Major Powers in Nigeria's Oil Sector. Nigeria's oil sector seems heavily influenced by some major powers like France, United States (US) and Italy that also have significant economic interests in the sector. For instance, the US oil imports from Nigeria accounts for more than half of Nigeria's exports.[15] China's economic interest in Nigeria's oil sector is increasing by the day with the acquisition of over 45 percent stake in offshore oil field.[16] This is turn is assessed by some industry watchers as being in direct conflict with US economic interests. Though, Nigeria might be willing to lean more towards China based on

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14 Inferred from the Researcher's unstructured interview of Snr Col Xu Hui Head, Teaching, Research and Translation Dept of CDS- NDU, Brig Gen SD Aliyu, Nigeria's DA to China and Lt Col Wang Peng, Chinese DDA to Nigeria.

15 Ricardo Contreras, Competing Theories of Economic Development, http://www.uiowa/ifdebook/ebook2/contents/partI-III.shtml. Accessed 3 Mar 12.

16 http:// www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/548-The-new-face-o..... Accessed 4 Mar 12.

the established mutually beneficial win-win concept, the move might orchestrate some conflict of interest between the various parties involved. Nigeria is thus faced with a dilemma in trying to maintain harmony between such major powers like China and the US.

Nigeria's Frail Soft Power Resource Base. It is said that military to military cooperation and training programmes can establish trans-national networks that enhance soft power.[17] Despite her commendable regional stature in the maritime environment of the Gulf of Guinea (GOG), Nigeria's current status as a developing nation indicates inadequate science and technological resources to back up the exercise of adequate soft power. This could probably be ameliorated if the Chinese government considers boosting the operational capability of the Nigerian Navy (NN) in the GOG through the donation of some maritime platforms. China, as a strategic partner, supporting Nigeria as such would complement the NN professional capability at providing better support for China's shipping and maritime interests within and around the GOG.

Poor Actualization of Training Priorities. A careful observation of the training and manpower development aspect in the areas of cooperation, gives an indication of some arbitrariness in the method of demanding and offering of the slots/vacancies between both countries. For example, only 28 of the 44 slots offered by the Chinese government were taken up by Nigeria implying that 36 percent were left void. This could bring about strategic financial losses as provisions already put in place by the Chinese MND and the PLA can rarely be re-assigned to other countries within a short time.[18] Hence, there is need for the creation of an adequate forum for the harmonization of priorities.

IDENTIFIED PROSPECTS IN SINO-NIGERIA SECURITY COOPERATION

This aspect of the study identifies prospects in the Sino-Nigeria security cooperation in areas such as the enhancement of naval diplomacy and joint exercises, military personnel exchanges, sharing of expertise in Peace Support Operations (PSO), establishment of partnerships in the aviation, ordinance, ship building/maintenance industries and jointly establishing a satellite launching site in Nigeria. These shall now be discussed.

Naval Port Visits (Naval Diplomacy) and Joint Exercises. Joint military

17 Luo Jianbo (Prof), Lecture to Participants of CDS- NDU on Soft Power and National Security, Institute of International Strategic Studies (IISS), The Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC, 9 Mar 2012.

18 Researcher 's Unstructured Interview of Lt Col Wang Peng, China's DDA to Nigeria, Abuja, 2 Feb 2012.

exercises are now understood as strategic necessities and they have become prominent features of peacetime preparedness as well as diplomatic policing.[19] During her mutual port calls and other activities, the PLA Navy has undertaken bilateral or multilateral joint maritime exercises with foreign navies.[20] In 2009, for the first time, China sent a medical detachment to Africa to hold a joint operation (PEACE ANGEL), to conduct medical training and rescue exercises with Gabon and to provide medical assistance for local residents.[21] The Hospital Ship (PEACE ARK) has visited some African countries including Kenya and Djibouti. Based on this premise and rising Chinese economic interests in Nigeria, it would be a strategic gain for both countries, especially their navies, to consider possibilities of conducting joint military exercises in order to promote capacity building, global peace and security cooperation through engagements in flag showing and port visits (naval diplomacy). Conducting such joint maritime exercises could also be the first steps in developing inter-operability, harmonization of equipment, operational strategy and tactics.

Military Personnel Exchanges in Military Educational Institutions. Joint military training is a catalyst to strengthen and concretize military cooperation. The exchange of supervisory cadre personnel such as instructors, directing staff and professors is now a common practice for the enhancement of security relationship between countries. Military education and training exchanges between China and Nigeria which is mainly shouldered by the Chinese side has not fully explored the afore-stated novel practice. Consequently, it would be beneficial for both countries to agree on modalities for such exchange in order to facilitate better understanding of inherent national cultural characteristics and methods of education employed by both countries, mutual trust and sharing of experiences on other beneficial issues. Thus, bi-lateral cooperation agreements between China and Nigeria ought to of necessity stress on the creation of forums for experienced personnel to be exchanged in their various military institutions.

Sharing Expertise in Peace Support Operations. Nigeria's prowess in PSOs has been internationally acclaimed. In order to consolidate on such gains, a Peace Keeping Training Centre (PKTC) was established in Nigeria. This Centre has been training members of the armed forces, diplomats and civil servants who are and might be involved in PSOs. It is also known that China has established a PKTC. Therefore China and Nigeria, being major troop contributors to the UN

19 Orjiude MN. Military Cooperation- A Common Ladder for Sino-Africa Mutual Development, Unpublished Paper Submitted to the CDS-NDU, China, 2008.

20 Information Office of the State Council, PRC, Op cit, p41.

21 Information Office of the State Council, PRC, Op cit, p42.

PSOs could conduct exchange programmes in this area for the enhancement of security cooperation and further benefit of both militaries.

Aviation and Ordnance Industries. The aviation and ordnance industries are strategic areas in the defence sector with wide ranging and untapped opportunities especially in Africa. In the area of aviation, China and Nigeria could establish a Joint Venture for the maintenance and eventual assembly/ manufacture of aircraft. This could be done using Nigeria as a hub for other African countries. This is underscored by the fact that the Nigerian Air Force has an elaborate hanger facility that has earlier served for the production and maintenance of the locally manufactured Air Beetle training aircraft. Such a hangar could easily be upgraded to serve as regional maintenance centre for the array of Chinese built aircraft acquired by Nigeria and other African countries. In the same vein, similar criterion could be applied to the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) for ordnance production and maintenance, upgrades of tanks, field equipment, combat support engineering facilities and air defence systems. Thus a Sino-Nigeria military cooperation in this regard could be mutually beneficial and make a positive impact towards building Nigeria's primary defence capabilities.

Ship Maintenance and Building. The Nigerian Navy has a major dockyard as well as a Shipyard that are currently used to maintain her fleet. Both facilities have also been involved in commercial operations to a limited scale. However, they still suffer from capacity under-utilization partly due to obsolete technology and equipment.[22] With consensus already reached for their upgrade through partnerships with experienced and internationally established dockyards, China being aptly experienced and qualified in this field could press for partnership with Nigeria utilizing the cordial relationship between both countries. Again, just like the aviation and ordnance industry, this could form a good hub for entrenching Chinese maritime related technology into the African continent for both countries mutual benefit.

Establishing Satellite Launching Site in Nigeria. China as a major player in space-technology exemplified through her various space missions has also assisted Nigeria acquire an aspect of space-technological capability by the successful launch of NIGCOMSAT-1R on 24 Dec 11 in China. This is a major achievement emanating from the bilateral cooperation between both nations. It is pertinent to note that Nigeria is located close to the equator which offers some technical advantages for geo-stationary satellite launches. Thus, a satellite

22 Abdus Sabur (Ed), Development Cooperation at the Dawn of the 21st Century: Bangladesh-German Partnership in Perspective, BIISS, Dhaka-1000, 2000, p253.

launched from Nigeria would get into the equatorial orbit faster than from far away latitudes with attendant increase in cost. This therefore provides a good attraction for intending satellite launching countries in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Consequently, China and Nigeria may consider establishing a joint satellite launching site in Nigeria for the common advantage of both nations.

PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCED SINO-NIGERIA SECURITY COOPERATION

The foregoing prospects can only be brought to fruition through carefully thought-out strategies which shall be considered in the following aspects.

Development of National Defense Technology and Industrial Base. The military is traditionally known to be in the vanguard of a nation's scientific, technological and industrial advancement for national defense. One of the easiest ways to achieve technological transfer is through military cooperation, international collaboration and coordination of joint ventures including research and development. While Nigeria does not expect China to share her more advanced and sensitive technologies, there are certainly some aspects of medium-to-high level military technology which Nigeria could benefit from and therefore could be granted access to. This concerns areas such as higher levels of refitting and maintenance of aircraft and ships.[23] China assisting Nigeria in the acquisition of technology and technical skills is the most substantial way by which the win-win concept could be assured Nigeria. This would definitely assist Nigeria's development and soft power which could also be vital for the support of Chinese interests within Nigeria's area of influence.

Establishment of Military Social and Non-Formal Relations Forum. A major way of reliving the experiences gained from studying in any institution is through interaction under a largely informal alumni body that reflects on the ideals of such an Institution. Such informal medium is known to work faster in sharing view points to aid formal understanding of issues devoid of the usual public service bureaucracy. The Chinese government could use such a forum as a solid base for establishing and maintaining links to "friends of China" in Nigeria. Members could also use such medium to keep up-dated their acquired Chinese cultures including language and other areas of interests while resident in China. Consequently, there is the need to consider establishing an Alumni Association for military officers that graduated from Chinese military institutions

23 Orjiude MN, Op cit.

in Nigeria.

Creation of a Joint Security Cooperation Committee. A major strategy towards enhancing the mutual benefits in military security cooperation is the creation of a Joint Security Cooperation Committee with membership drawn from the Defense Section of the Chinese Embassy, Nigerian Defense Headquarters and the Directors of Training of the various Services. The committee could be tasked to find out both countries's priority areas for cooperation, the roles they are expected to play towards the achievement of these priorities and what outcomes they are to anticipate at various stages of the cooperation process. This is necessary in order to minimize misunderstanding and possible arbitrariness by interested parties as well as to promote better understanding. Such a committee when established could be empowered to conduct workshops on emerging matters for consideration, approval and endorsement by the relevant military higher authorities.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing solidarity and cooperation with African countries has always been an important component of China's independent foreign policy of peace. The Sino-Nigeria relation which is derived from this Sino-African policy has evolved positively in recent times especially in the development of economic cooperation. However, it was observed that the aspect of security cooperation is not as developed and would require some deliberate efforts to actualize the desired win-win relationship situation for both states. Despite some challenges to the existing security cooperation, the security cooperation between the 2 countries will have a bright future if they can take effective measures to enhance it.

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Edited by Perry Onwuzulike and Wang Bin