

# Reflections on State Security and Violence in Africa: A Prognostic Analysis

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## Abstract

The 21st century beginning from 2000 to 2014 portrays Africa's current situation as beset by conflicts and violence, drawing attention from every part of the world. As in decades earlier, it is no good news! Prominent among these are terrorism with its devastating impact, revolutions, uprisings, turmoil, communal conflicts, coup d'état, hatred and malicious actions towards ethnic groups, institutionalised division, deep rooted enmity between ethnic groups, dangerous religious sects, criminal political groups, corruption and all sorts of deprivation. This paper is however, a broad reflection of the general situation in the continent that we narrowed to Nigeria and its peculiarities. The Marxist theory of the post-colonial state was chosen as the tool for analysis. Further, we adopted quantitative descriptive analysis with secondary literature forming the base of our information source. In addition, we had personal discussions with security agents, though not systemised. Finally, we seek to make a further contribution to the ongoing intellectual efforts by identifying some areas that demand urgent attention. It is hoped that the strategic suggestions that this paper discusses, will provide a theoretical and practical platform for further studies and subsequent solution towards the negative news reports, thereby making news from Africa to be really, "good news".

## Keywords

State Security, Violence, Corruption, Africa

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## 1. Introduction

Africa like every other continent, participated in the early epochs of the extension of man's control over his environment as they increasingly showed their ability to live a more satisfactory life through exploiting the resources of nature. However, this political system was truncated and dominated by the European imposed political system. Hence, the nature and character of the African state remain problematic and its role in promoting

sustainable development is far from being resolved. The post-colonial state in Africa is akin to the colonial state in the area of authoritarian, divisive, predatory, exclusive politics, and has been an instrument in the service of the dominant capitalist class. Development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses all spheres of life. No society claims to be developed when the quality of life of its people is not assured.

State security can be seen as National Security which is referred to as the requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic, diplomatic, power projection and political power (Free Encyclopaedia, 2003). State security encompasses a broad range of facets, all of which impinge on the non military or economic security of the nation and the values espoused by the national society. Apparently, state security entails the possession of economic security, energy security, political security, human security, environmental security, social security, among others.

Violence on the other hand, is generally defined as having the intention to harm or damage something (Encarta dictionary, 2009/2010). The simple definition of security “as feeling and assurance of being protected” can only be understood as an antithesis to violence. The application of violence however, is not restricted to Africa, but while others are thought to have adopted measures in curtailing the causes. Africa seems to be unable to chart this same way. The modern state monopolizes power in order to maintain effective control over its citizens. This rests on the right to apply physical coercion. The nation-state concept is very important in modern politics and government; described as a political apparatus; it is recognized to have sovereign rights within its borders of demarcated territorial area, able to back its claim of sovereignty by control of military power. Thus, the nation state is seen by some as “an organisation of violence that serves the interests of all” (Ebuley, 1995). The application of force by the modern state has often been used for social control. The modern state with all the necessary characteristics however, rarely exists in Africa. Africa of today is made up of nation states with boundaries set to suit the interest of the past and present colonizers. Not only the boundaries, but invariably the systems and processes of government of the colonized areas were and are still manipulated and bastardly exploited.

Most African states have experienced different forms of conflict rooted in both internal and external factors since their independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These conflicts include: political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, cultism, ethnic militias, terrorism, boundary disputes, criminality and organized crimes. These problems individually and collectively constitute threats to peace, security and development of the continent.

The struggle to secure the most basic necessities of life like: food, shelter, clothing, fuel and medicine important to the attainment of physical and national security are important towards overall peace and development. Social unrests arising from the absence of such basic human security can indeed lead to security problems and violence. This is manifested by the recent social unrests in various African countries due to the failure of government policies to provide or manage the basic human needs of their citizens. To illustrate, there is civil strife in Egypt that ended with the enthronement of Morsi as president, in Tunisia. Ben-Ali was removed through a popular uprising; violent and armed insurgency led to the change of government in Libya; there is no peace in Sudan as its citizens demand a change in government. Many parts of the continent are in turmoil. Somalia does not have a widely accepted central government. Right now, the Al-Shabab insurgency under the cover of wanting to Islamize the state is causing devastating damage to that country, even venturing into Kenya. Mali is divided into North and South, secession by the Tuaregs led to this partition. Nigeria is fighting the Boko Haram Muslim fundamentalist, who as groups, such as Maitasine Islamist before it caused tremendous damage in some northern parts of Nigeria. Zaire, Uganda, Congo Democratic Republic, Central African Republic and even Rwanda are all engaged in one form of military violence, insurgency and banditry. Meanwhile, these security concerns are diverse and complex, ranging from political disagreements to criminal activities with alarming dimensions and consequences that signal to the international community that Africa is not a safe and secure place suitable for economic investment and activities. This is particularly important in view of the efforts being made to create the desired atmosphere to attract foreign direct investment.

Apart from the effects of security concerns on the economic fortunes of the continent, the nature of the security challenges facing the continent also has implications for its political system. Social cohesion among various groups and interests is important in the process of national political development. Therefore, the constituent parts of each of the country must be and indeed feel that they are being carried along in the process of national governance. Since widespread discontent and loss of confidence in the system have ways of affecting national political stability; thus, continuing escalation of violence and crises across the continent will impinge on its survival.

Hence, there is a need to rethink and improve on policies and institutional means of dealing with security concerns arising in our continent. Politically, governments should engage in programmes of cultural and political education and orientation that seek to enthrone the principles and practices essential for sustainability. This paper therefore, discusses the origins of the discontent with the state in Africa, which has led and will continue to lead to social and political disorder in the continent. It is also a broad reflection of the general situation in the continent that we narrowed to Nigeria and its peculiarities. We adopted quantitative descriptive analysis with secondary literature forming the base of our information source. We, in addition, had personal discussions with security agents, though not systemised. We then, proffered solutions, which are capable of enhancing security, peace and prosperity of the continent.

## 2. Theoretical Perspective

We shall predicate our study on the Marxist theory of the post-colonial state. This analytical tool relatively analyses the post colonial political economy of African states that predicates the state security and violence within these states. Karl Marx is the major proponent of this theory; though, he never called it Marxist theory of neo-colonial states but advanced its attributes. Thus:

- The post-colonial state is purely an instrument of class domination;
- The primitive accumulation with the state power is done by domestic power and certain external forces;
- Post colonial states are rentier states parcelled out in Patron-Client chains to those who use the state power for selfish ends.

Marxist theorists like Miliband, Ake, Lenin and Ekekwe have in their different studies added to the development of the post-colonial theory of the state. To illustrate, Miliband (1977: 109) argues that the post-colonial states are dependent on the foreign forces that colonised them and thus the state is both the source of economic power and an instrument of accumulation of economic power as the state is the major means of production. For Ake, it is the economic factor which is the most decisive of all the other elements (social structure, political structure and belief system) of the society and which largely determines the character of the others. Though, that is not to say that the economic structure is autonomous and strictly determines the others. All the social structures are interdependent and interact in complex ways. But, it is the economic factor, which provides the axis around which all the movement takes place, and imparts certain orderliness to the interaction (Ake, 1981: 3-4). Hence, the economic contact between the western capitalists and the African leaders led to the subsequent interaction of other aspects of social life that followed. Thus, by following the dynamics of the economic system, we see how it leads to the transformation of existing social structures, and how it leads to the emergence of new social structures, particularly an African petit-bourgeoisie whose interest soon put it in opposition to the colonial system and overthrow of the colonial political system. The economic system which generated the changes is itself not overthrown. So we have indigenous leaders who are in political office but with little economic base. Meaning that the new rulers try to use the only tool they have, political power, to create an economic base in order to consolidate their economic power. Hence, the political is influencing and even transforming economic structures and social structures. Even though, the state is said to be the product of class struggle in the society. That is, the state emerged to mediate between the antagonistic classes in order to maintain law and order in such a way that none of the groups will be consumed in fruitless struggle over the ownership of the means of production (Lenin, 1984: 10-11). The neo-colonial states are parts and parcels of the class struggle it was supposed to moderate. Thus, the post-colonial states rather than maintain or moderate economic relations, became an instrument of domination, exploitation and intimidation of the subjects (Ekekwe, 1986: 12 in Ezeibe, 2011).

We can deduce from the foregoing that state security which encompasses the facets of life, giving the citizen a feeling that he/she is protected is an antithesis of violence. The failure of the African governments' policies to provide or manage the basic human needs of their citizens leads to social unrest. Conflicts in Africa are rooted both in internal and external factors since independence. Thus,

A ruling class that creates no programme for social security creates conditions for generalised insecurity crisis. But then, that is all that can happen under the current World Bank-IMF supervised capitalist or neo-liberal fundamentalism. It is the fundamentalism of market ideology that has created the condition, through the instrumentality of a ruling class that is obsessed with primitive private accumulation, for splitting Nigeria's working people along ethnic-nationalist and religious lines and that generated increased crime rates and violence across social class lines (Omotoye, 2011).

Moreover, according to [Biodun and Aliyu \(2011\)](#), “a nation is as secured as the quality of life of its people. In other words, the notion of security should be redefined to pragmatically address poverty, unemployment, hunger, ill-health, environmental degradation, safety of persons and property; ethno-religious crises and human rights abuses pervading our land”. African states pursued economic interests at the expense of a secure and stable environment. The various African governments have proved incapable of alleviating the critical development gaps in the continent. The security condition in the region is lax as a climate of socio-economic uncertainty helped by easy access to firearms among vast stretches of the populace, made the continent a fertile ground for multiple conflagrations. The firearms used by militants and terrorists are readily available in the continent since small-arms filter into the continent from different quarters. For instance, the Niger Delta militants get their arms through Cameroun and Gabon from conflict zones like Angola, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast et al. ([Amaraegebu, 2011](#)). He added that, the success of oil bunkering in Nigeria is an indication that influential state officials offer cover and protection to criminal elements to enable them operate and also provide security to well-established cartels without the interference of the state security forces ([Coventry, 2009](#)). Added to these tactical difficulties, are the problems of overwhelming and unwavering forces of corruption. Government’s role as the dominant player in the management of the petroleum sector and the lack of operative accountability structure renders the industry and in fact the political system vulnerable to corruption. Corrupt state and security officials work in partnership with criminal elements to undermine effective law enforcement in dealing with militancy and even terrorists in the continent. These governance issues have produced a baneful structure in an environment that engenders instability in the political system as the people yearn for the elusive dividends of good governance.

The leadership pattern in Africa lacks the necessary focus capable of instilling national development and promoting political stability. The African leaders are preoccupied with their desire for the appropriation and privatisation of the African state. The fall of different republics like the fall of the Second Republic of Nigeria for instance was precipitated by the pervasive corruption and, the attendant political violence that greeted electoral manipulations, in a bid to stick to power ([Ayeni, 1988](#)). Similarly, the military coups and counter coups were also plagued by bad leadership, although their successors did not fare better. Consequently, development performance was slowed down, and political instability continued to pervade the polity, as focus was shifted to combat the looming forces of insecurity and internal regime instability.

State security could be accomplished when the operation of government is in line with the prevailing legal and ethical principles of the political community. When this is the situation, system affect will be high, and the people would collectively aspire to participate in the activities of the state, knowing full well that adherence to the rules and procedures would serve the interest of the greatest number of the population. Deprivation of benefits and selective justice would not be encouraged, as individual’s rights would be protected within the ambit of the law and political leaders hold dear the watchwords of transparency and accountability in governance.

### 3. Political History of Nigeria—A Case Study of an African State

In the following analysis, the sample on violent insurgency of Nigeria as a prominent African country was chosen with the sole aim of showing that violence is all over Africa as a result of the inability governments to make policies and programs that will promote state security. There is also, need to understand the dynamics of armed violence in Africa. Nigeria was chosen out of all countries for the following reasons:

- 1) Nigeria is abundantly rich in natural and mineral resources.
- 2) Nigeria, the largest Nation in Africa, gained her independence almost at the same time with most African countries, early 1960’s.
- 3) Nigeria has a story of Islamic background and faith that fuelled religious insurgency.
- 4) Nigeria, like other African countries has been witnessing state economic corruption banditry in decades.
- 5) Finally, Nigeria, like other countries in Africa is blessed with a mosaic of ethnic groups that could have been conceived as an asset to national development.

As a country sampled in this study, is Nigeria degenerating to a failed state? Is she as a country on the edge of losing control? We assume in this paper that all sorts of deprivations and state incapability which exist in the countries mentioned contributed and still contribute to the main reason fuelling armed violence in the Nigeria state and other similar states suffering from it.

Nigeria as a nation, has been having very disturbing violent religious insurgency in the North of the country, kidnappings in the South-East and similar situation in the Niger Delta. The escalation was witnessed from the

early 2001 to the present day. The population of Nigeria is estimated at about 170 million, a figure highly contested.

Nigeria gained her independence from Britain on October 1, 1960 after more than one hundred years of colonial rule. The creation of Nigeria which reached its peak with the 1914 amalgamation as many would argue is by accident. Its vast resources, multi-ethnic groups, ethno-religious communities, etc, has turned into a nightmare, instead of blessing. Nigeria's difficult journey began with the merging of different nationalities into one, to serve British colonial interest. So much has been written on this merger with only one striking confirmation, that, it should not have happened. Now that it has happened, Nigerians are demanding for a dialogue among Nigeria's ethnic groups to determine the extent of interest on nation building.

Immediately after independence in 1960, disunity among the political elites soon began to manifest itself, portraying the inadequate willingness to be together. The leader of the opposition, Chief Awolowo was accused in 1962 of plotting an overthrow of the just two year government, headed by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. The turmoil that followed is widely assumed to have led to the fall of the first republic in January 1966 through a military coup d'état. Since then, violence and counter violence has become the order of politics in Nigeria. Between 1967 and 1970, there was the brutal Biafran war that led to the devastation of Eastern Nigeria. More than 1.5 million people lost their lives and unimaginable hardship for those directly affected by this war. 1970 saw the end of the hostilities, yet, Nigeria has known no peace. Simultaneously to the end of hostilities was the beginning of Nigeria's richness through the exportation of crude oil which brought enormous wealth to Nigeria. Unfortunately, the majority of Nigerians, especially those from the Niger Delta are excluded from this wealth. Additionally, ethnicity, centralised government and ruling corrupt elite overshadow life in Nigeria. With the intervention of the military in 1983, Nigeria departed from all efforts in building a vibrant nation with both democratic and economic potentials grinding to a halt. Definitely, there was corruption and inefficiency in the system that led to the military entrance to politics again in 1983. However, is corruption enough reason for a coup? The vastness of the country's inefficient bureaucracy and various degrees of deprivation, prepared the ground for other forms of agitation.

The most serious threat to domestic peace in the 1980s came not from opposition parties, civil societies or even the exploited Niger Delta areas but from a Muslim sect, based in Kano and known as the Maitasine sect. It is widely assumed that its 5000 members came overwhelmingly from neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger and Cameroun. The leader of the sect, Mohammed Marra, apparently under Libyan influence, was arrested and prosecuted. The federal government only began to intervene after the sect had attacked the residence of the Governor of Kano state during which many police officers were killed. Government sent in troops killing over 1000 members and deportation of the remaining members. However, Islamic fundamentalism has continued to grow in the north since the 1990s and also became a potent political force; and this is to the detriment of many elites from the region.

During the early 1990's, the agitation for justice and equitable wealth distribution continued to put pressure on the ruling junta. Niger Delta indigenes began to openly ask questions on wealth distribution, and compensation for the destruction of their environment. The hanging of Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa (environmental activist) from the Ogoni tribe by the military relates to the pressure the military had to contend with. The death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, brought condemnation worldwide and as all efforts for peaceful settlement failed, the Niger Delta people began an armed struggle. Initially, they were extremely successful as it was a revolt against injustice and tremendous deprivation. Over 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange comes from crude oil, and the inability of the Nigerian government to tackle the Niger Delta issue peacefully, resulted in the gradual build up of tensions all over the country. The Nigerian state, represented by its security agents have caused serious havoc on the people it is supposed to protect. These include the Odi massacre and similar government agents' massacre in Zango-Kataf and in Taraba state, the Jukun-Tiv strife.

With the return to civilian government in 1999 headed by Olusegun Obasanjo, expectations for justice and security were high. The killings and violence unfortunately did not stop as expected; such as the Jos ethnic problems which resulted in the death of thousands of Nigerians. This conflict in the interim, has transformed from settler-indigene to inter-religious conflict between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State. Obasanjo's attempt to use government might instead of sincere negotiations failed with a result that the aggrieved citizens distanced themselves from the government that was supposed to provide state security and guarantee peaceful co-existence.

With his exit in 2007 came President Yar'Adua, a northern politician and former governor of Katsina state. President Yar'Adua's tenure was brief as head of state, due to illness and death but was able to initiate peaceful settlement of the Niger Delta through his Amnesty Policy. This was an offer to the militants to give up armed resistance, which in-between reached its peak. Oil production was almost brought to a halt and Nigeria before the amnesty programme was having challenges meeting her obligations—both internal and external. After protracted negotiations, the leaders of the militant groups and clan leaders agreed to the tenets of the amnesty programme. With this, relative peace was returned to the creeks and Nigeria and her partners continued with further oil sales and exploration. Unfortunately, the president died in 2010 and his vice, Goodluck Jonathan took over, after a threatening political situation that tended to divide the nation.

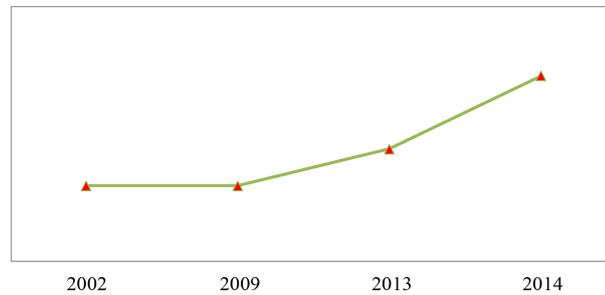
Jonathan continued with Yar'Adua's programmes in acting capacity until he assumed as the substantive head of state through the emergency law coined as "Doctrine of Necessity" because there was no clear transition law in case of death of the incumbent president prior to this. Jonathan's assumption of office became contentious among the political elite. Southern Nigeria peaked against Northern Nigeria. This, brewed tension, distrust, hatred and animosity throughout the country. Among the reasons for the above mentioned was the North's insistency on fielding the president after the demise of Yar'Adua. According to the northern political class, the presidency "rotation ship" was zoned to them and it was expected that Jonathan will not contest in the forthcoming 2011 elections. Jonathan, supported by the south-south and the entire southern Nigeria insisted upon contesting, truncating some of the principles such as "rotation ship" that was viewed as the bedrock of the nation's march to stability within his political party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Though Jonathan won the internal party nomination and subsequent presidential election for 2011, Nigeria however, has known no peace.

An Islamic sect known as "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad" alias Boko Haram has been tormenting the nation with unprecedented violence, which indeed calls to mind, the need for one Nigeria. The group was formed in 2002 by a Muslim cleric, Jusuf, whose grievance is the western civilization which they claim has desecrated the culture and religion of Islam in northern Nigeria. At the beginning, the group remained low key and was bent on verbal attack of northern Muslims for not keeping to the laws of Sharia. It was the aftermath of the killing of its members numbering about 800 over their refusal to wear helmet and the televised execution of its founder in 2009, that the group became violent. Efforts to dialogue with this group have failed, as the group recently threatened to cause more havoc in the northern states where it is operating. Indeed, no city in Nigeria can be said to be outside the reach of this group. Abuja, the capital city has been successfully attacked by this deadly sect such as the [United Nations](#) office and the headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force. Most recently, the Chibok kidnap, East of Abuja and Jos bombings add to the disaster. Figures obtained from, [The Facts on Nigeria \(2014\)](#) covering 2009 to 2014 shows the following deaths related to Boko Haram: 2009 (830), 2010 (920), 2011 (1427), 2011 (1227), 2012 (1386), 2013 (2050) and more than 3500 injured over the same period. The figures vary as most of those who were injured are forgotten. The Nigerian security agents have been accused by human rights groups for seriously violating the rights of suspected terrorists through extrajudicial killings. Figures of such incidences are always kept secret. The public execution of Jusuf and the collateral damage associated with fighting such insurgency notwithstanding.

According to a recent publication from Europe, "Knecht Kristi" (2012), it is claimed that Boko Haram has 300 Muslim boys and girls ready for suicide attacks against Abuja and some northern states. Further, the newspaper reported that according to a former Boko Haram member, Mauritania and Somalia are the training places for terrorists and bomb manufacturing. Moreover, the information revealed that the Boko Haram members have infiltrated the Nigerian security outfit, making it almost impossible for the Federal government to effectively adopt measures of securing the country.

The identity of the key men behind this sect remains a mirage. Some however suggest that the origins could be traced to Sudan where a similar group, the Salafin Muslim sect has its base. The inability of the federal government to provide security for its citizens continues to pose serious questions over the willingness and efficiency of the system being momentarily adopted. After all, the west with all their intelligence, military and logistic capability, has not been able to defeat completely Al-Qaeda or similar groups; who more or less have also formed an alliance over boarders to prosecute their holy jihad. Boko Haram liaises with Al-Qaeda North Africa and Al-shabaab terrorists from Somalia, and has sworn to tear Nigeria apart until their Islamization process is successfully implemented. The federal government is prosecuting this war side by side with succession politics thereby making it possible for other groups to spring up and continue where others stopped and with new ideas and tactics. With the internationalization of the conflict, it is hoped that security will become better.

**Figure 1** shows the gradual development of the Terror group. The group maintained a low key posture until



**Figure 1.** Formation and activities of the Boko Haram.

the killing of over 800 members as a result of the helmet ban crisis in the northern states and the televised execution of its founder Jusuf, in 2009. The graph portrays a 200% from 2009 to the present day.

#### 4. Conclusions/Recommendation

The paper attempted a discussion of the origins of the discontent with the Nigerian state in Africa, which has led and continues to lead to social and political disorder in the country. It was also a broad reflection of the general situation in the continent. The *Marxist theory of the post-colonial state was adopted* as our tool of analysis. State security encompasses a broad range of facets like: economic, social, psychological, energy, political, human and environmental security, all of which impinge on the non military or economic security of the nation and the values espoused by the national society. The failure of the state to provide the expected security as mentioned above, leads to violence in the state. With reference to Nigeria, we proffered certain solutions since for any meaningful development to take place in the country there must be state security. Among our recommendations are the following:

##### 4.1. Better Policing/Intelligent Policing

- 1) Enhanced training of personnel to minimize loss of lives, and ability to acquire information, analyze and use it efficiently.
- 2) Provision of equipment for the force such as communication gadgets; healthy vehicles with internalized mechanic workshops for repairs and maintenance.
- 3) Security agents' unconditional compliance to the rule of law. Here personnel qualification becomes important. Many police officers are illiterates.
- 4) Withdrawal of police personnel from the "big ones". Re-introduction of the first republic police guidelines in respect of police attachment to eminent citizens.

##### 4.2. Leadership with Vision

- 1) Political parties' formation—internal selection must be transparent, free and fair and must be seen to be so by the losers. Spirit of tolerance of other views must be re-introduced and enhanced. Without negotiation, there cannot be cohesion.
- 2) Reduction of scarce state funds on frivolities. The remuneration of political office holders must be reviewed. Nigeria, for example, spends close to 30% of its yearly budget on only the members of the national assembly. We suggest the following:
  - a) All members/citizens voted into the national assembly must be professionals in their various fields and must be evidenced that they earn their living through such.
  - b) Remuneration must be on Pro-Sitting basis with minimal allowances. No member is allowed to have more than a staff acting as secretary to be paid by the national assembly. Additional staff to be paid by self.

##### 4.3. Economy: Agricultural and Mineral Resources

The main sources of the African Economies are basically mono-cultured and this must change. It is very recommended that food production and eradication of hunger must become a new focus. Africa cannot depend

eternally on western aid, which is also plagued with virus against Africa. They have conditions that are becoming continually dehumanizing. That is why it is appreciable and laudable, the recent attempts in Nigeria to remain not net food importer but net food exporter. If this is achieved, Nigeria and indeed Africa would have made a real giant stride towards economic liberation, peace, stability and secure against violence. It is when sustainability in food supply is achieved, can such attempts of further integration like through NEPAD goals etc. be said to be reasonable and possible.

Finally, despair should not be the answer. There is a need for a new focus that requires discipline and visionary leaders. It is a pity that no African leader has received the Mo Ibrahim prize the past five years. Where are they, indeed, leaders who want to reach the top through excellence and dedication? Everyone is called upon to be a leader. Not just those over there. Like Ghandi said “you must be the change that you wish to see in the world”.

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