

Policing for Sustainable Security and Democratic Governance: The Nigeria Police Experience

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this review is to examine the expected roles of the Nigeria Police Force in a democratic setting, its challenges and suggests some workable solutions to some of the perennial problems associated with policing in Nigeria. The Nigeria Police Force is indubitably a victim of its colonial provenance. Originally, it was formed by the colonial masters as part of a general constabulary force for the pacification of the restiveness of the newly created colony of Lagos. The force grew gradually to become a ferocious armed enforcer of the will of the colonizers over the people. The Police perform three main functions namely; prevention and detection, protective as well as arrest and detention. Consequently, the federal government of Nigeria should provide conducive work environment for functional policing to thrive before pointing accusing fingers at those bad officers.

Keywords: Police, Force, Rights, Freedom Prevention, Detection and Protection.

INTRODUCTION

An organization was set up and called 'The Force' by the colonial masters, Britain. Amongst other reasons, 'The Force' was created to cope with the restiveness of communities yearning for freedom during the colonial era. The transition from "The Force" to the Nigeria Police Force was evolutionary in the sense that it followed the usual political developments. Nevertheless, the Nigeria Police Force is an unavoidable factor in our quest for a secured and free society as security is central to the enjoyment of other freedoms and rights. However, over the years, Nigerians have cried out against the atrocities committed by the Police against the citizens and the damage done to the system they are supposed to be protecting. A cursory look at the catalogue of such heinous crimes against innocent and helpless Nigerians is frightening. For example, the Apo killing in Abuja metropolis is one of the numerous cases in recent times.

Hence, the Police have not been able to transit from the initial mentality of oppression, suppression and violence which marked its creation to a new mentality of subservience, cooperation and respect for citizens which are benchmarks of democracies. Therefore, from an oppressive, accusatory and brutal agent designed to intimidate the people, the Police should be an investigative, impartial and truly people-oriented police. Since the emergence of political community on the face of the earth, the challenge of how to establish and maintain peace, security of lives, property, law and order, and so on, have occupied the thinking of mankind. Hence, the establishment of the Nigeria Police Force to

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perform the aforementioned roles. Without performing these roles of maintaining peace, law and orders, people would have lived by the survival of the fittest as observed by Thomas Hobbes and consequently, the various organs of government namely; the legislature, the executive and the judiciary would not have been able to perform their constitutional roles for the development of the society. However, when Nigeria gained her political independence in 1960, there were expectations that the Nigeria Police Force would be re-organized and re-orientated from the colonial occupation force to serve the people. Unfortunately, these expectations never came to reality but instead, policing in Nigeria has been more or less a carry-over from the colonial administration, more reactive than proactive, more garrison and para-military based rather than being friendly and human rights oriented policing. Surprisingly, bribery and corruption, unlawful and arbitrary arrest, deprivation of personal liberty and extra-judicial killings, are some common crimes committed by those who are primarily and constitutionally empowered to protect and promote the rights of Nigerian citizenry.

These observations notwithstanding, critics and analysts agree that the policing duties cannot be reasonably removed from communities aspiring to decency, good life and social justice. If that should be the case, where do we place the Nigeria Police Force? As enemy or friend? Police are by law friend to all but in practice, considering the Nigeria situation, it would be fallacious to call them friends. This is further confirmed by Tola Adeniyi as cited in Jejenywa (2006), who describes the Nigeria Police Force as the most hated, most feared, most abused, most misunderstood, most neglected and generally the most detested of all the professionals in the country. Judging from this statement, it is clear that there are discrepancies from what the people expect from policemen and what the policemen are actually doing.

The emergence of functional democracy and the establishment of human rights and civil society organizations in Nigeria have helped to increase peoples' awareness and alertness to their rights. At this juncture, it is important to say that this study does not intend to condemn the Nigeria Police Force which all of us have more than enough reasons to do, instead, it offers suggestions for improvement in order to make the institution more functional and responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of a democratizing society, thereby opening a new vista of hope for improved security, service delivery and a better image for the Nigeria Police.

The word "Police" is derived from Greek word '*Polis*' meaning that part of non-ecclesiastical administration having to do with safety, health and order of the state. Therefore, Greek policing means the act of governing and regulating the welfare, security needs and order of the city-state in the interest of the public (Ehinder, 2006). The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) defines police as "an official organization whose job is to make people obey the law and to prevent and solve crime" while Dorling (1998) opines that police is "the civil force of a state responsible for maintaining public order". Okiri, Emodi and Imoudu (2008) note that the Nigeria Police Force was established for the prevention and detection of crimes, protection of lives and property, the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and the

performance of such military duties as may be required of them within or outside. By and large, it could be seen as the governmental department charged with the preservation of public order, the promotion of public safety and prevention and detection of crime.

The Historical Perspective of the Nigeria Police Force

The Nigeria Police Force is indubitably a victim of its colonial provenance. Originally, it was put together by the colonial masters as part of a general constabulary force for the pacification of the restiveness of the newly created colony of Lagos. The force grew gradually to become a ferocious armed enforcer of the will of the colonizers over the people. Some of the earliest recruits consisted of run-away slaves, petty criminals and local roughnecks put together into a unit in 1863 and cynically named Glover's Hausas because most of them were from the Northern part of Nigeria (Nigerian Tribune, 2011). They were trained, indoctrinated and deployed to assist in subjecting or bending the people to the will of the new foreign colonizers. Its original mandate was never to serve and protect the people as much as to enforce law and orders sufficient to facilitate colonial resource extraction and evacuation. In the real sense, therefore, they were the first armed enforcers of the will of the emerging colonial state and served in that capacity throughout the period of colonial rule. This same force with all its pristine anti-people inclinations, unrefined and unreformed was donated to Nigeria and was commanded by a British Inspector-General until 1964. This probably explains why Rotimi (2003) observes that Native Police not only served as the agents in the fight against crime but as agents in colonial socialization; agents of control in the colonial territories and as symbols of employer's authority.

The point in this brief trip down memory lane is to put the police and their conduct in proper perspective that what eventually emerged as the Nigeria Police Force was actually a real force, profoundly anti-people in the sense that it was primarily established for the sole purpose of crushing any form of local resistance to foreign political domination. The force performed to the satisfaction of the colonial masters who is ably assisted in robbing the people of their sovereignty. Dambazau (2007) explains that it was this climate of authoritarianism in Nigeria which provided the police the 'license to violence'. Unfortunately too, this anti-people force was neither fully transformed to protect and serve nor completely weaned from its 'historical mission' even after Nigeria became independent in 1960. Suffice to say that since independence to date the relationship between the Nigeria citizens and the police has been characterized by extra-judicial killings, brutality and bloody confrontations (This Day, 2009).

In line with the original mandate defined for it, the force has remained no more than the enforcer of the will of the post-colonial State. It is therefore, not surprising that it has continued to be haunted by its negative role definition. Civilians are often treated with disdain by the police, civil protest is regarded by them as subversive and criminal, the fundamental freedom and civil liberties of the people are callously trampled upon in the service of authoritarian post-colonial State, freedom of speech and association is often criminalized inevitably making the 'police uniform' a veritable symbol of oppression and

intimidation. Indeed, the training given to police officers has done little to change their perception as instrument of State terror. Little wonder why the police institution now is not efficient in discharging its primary task of crime prevention and detection and protection of the populace.

Qualities of Good Police Personnel

As postulated by Okafor (2008), to be able to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently, police officers must possess the following qualities.

Friendliness: They must be courteous, civil and approachable while discharging their duties.

Integrity: They must be forthright, non-discriminatory, honest, reliable, responsible and dependable.

Meticulous: They must pay attention to details in order to achieve efficiency.

Knowledgeable: They must be conversant with the laws of the land – national, natural, religious law, force orders, administrative instructions and events around the world.

Stability: This means that the officers must be emotionally stable, tactful, patient, and tolerant as well as have proper control of their temperament in trying and tempting periods to withstand trying and exciting nature of police work.

Power of Observation: They must be able to notice unusual things, events and persons in and around them.

Law abiding: They must obey the law at all times and lead by example.

Since the value of human life is inestimable and everybody runs to the police for protection, it therefore, behoves on the force to develop and improve on these qualities as a means of improving their overall performance. Additionally, they should be easily adaptable considering current advancements especially, in the aspect of technology. There is need for personnel of the Police Force to keep themselves abreast with current changes in technology.

The Expected Roles of Nigeria Police

The classical definition of a policeman is help; government by your side. It is an arm through which the government plays a crucial role of helping the citizen in all ramifications including helping a pregnant woman get to hospital for attention and other functions regarded as personal. To be specific, the police have constitutional roles to play in any society. Section 215 (3) of the 1999 Constitution spells out that the Nigeria Police is saddled with the maintenance of public safety and public order. The police are responsible for the arrest of crime and criminals and prosecutions of criminals. It has the responsibility of protecting lives, private and public property. The Nigeria Police is also constitutionally empowered to protect harbours, water ways, railways and air fields (FRN, 1999). Broadly speaking, the Police perform three main functions namely: prevention and detection function; protection function and arrest and detention function (Okafor, 2008).

Prevention and Detection function: The hallmark of police efficiency lies in their ability to prevent crime. This efficiency is realizable if the police is provided with information and information can only come from members of the public. The public would volunteer information if only they enjoy the confidence of the police. According to the General Instructions for British Police, cited in Okafor (2008):

The principal objective of policing is the prevention of crime and the absence of crime is considered the best proof of the complete efficiency of the police.

In their attempt to prevent crime, the police do engage themselves in the following functions;

- i Surveillance of criminal hideouts and dark or black spots;
- ii Stop and search;
- iii Beat patrol and guard;
- iv Agent provocateur (collecting evidence of crime by mingling with criminals)

The effective discharge of these functions has led to the prevention and the detection of crime. But where crime cannot be prevented, investigation is therefore, conducted to detect the crime. But while carrying out these functions, the tendency to violate human rights cannot be totally ruled out. Therefore, it is important for the force to be wary of these tendencies while carrying out these functions. For example, there is nothing bad in raiding as it serves as a crime-prevention tool. Effective policing demands that raiding must be restricted to black spots, criminal hideouts, uncompleted buildings and drug joints in order to prevent criminals from meeting in such places before setting out to commit crime. And because of the possibility of arresting innocent persons, those raided must be screened so that those who cannot give reasonable account of themselves are arrested for further interrogation and investigation while those who are victims of circumstances are apologized to and released unconditionally.

Protection function: The police has the right to stop and question a suspected individual at any time but once the individual is able to give reasonable account of himself/herself, the person must be allowed to proceed. However, if allowing the journey will put the life of the individual in danger or at risk, the person can be taken into protective custody in order to be released later unconditionally when it is safe to do so. It is both unethical and unprofessional for people to be tricked into a bus or arrest people on the street or at a beer parlour and treat them as suspected criminals.

Arrest and detention function: The Police has the constitutional right to invite an individual to the police station for routine questioning and to be released unconditionally immediately after the questioning, provided he/she has no case to answer. The Police also have the power to arrest and to detain a suspect for an act or omission punishable under the law. That is to say, the act or omission must be prohibited by a written law or upon reasonable suspicion that the person has committed an offence. The implication of this is that, a suspect can be detained but not unnecessarily. This is to ensure that police cells are not converted to detention camps. The purpose and justification for detention is ultimately to protect the society against crime and criminals. This purpose can only be achieved if the period of detention is used to ensure that upon the release of the suspect, he/she is charge

to court and will be able to live a law-abiding and self supporting life. Hence, all remedial, educational, moral, spiritual and other forms of assistance are applied to the individual needs of the detained, so that they might not become more deformed than reformed by the time they are out of incarceration. Since all these reformatory assistance are not available at the police station, suspects/detainees stay at the police station should be as brief as possible. To achieve this objective, all officers must at all times conduct themselves well and perform their duties in such a way as to positively influence the detainees by exemplary conduct and to command their respect. By extension, section 4 of the Police Act Cap 359 Law of the Federation 1990 as cited in Ehindero (2006) states that the primary duties of the Nigeria Police Force include the following:

- * Prevention and detention of criminals.
- * Apprehension of offenders
- * Preservation of law and order
- * Protection of life and property
- * Enforcement of all law
- * Regulation within which they are directly charge
- * Military duties within and outside Nigeria as it may be required by the law.

Major Challenges/Constraints Facing the Nigeria Police Force

Every nation gets the kind of police it deserves. The kind of shameful police institution we have in Nigeria today is a collective reflection of what Nigeria is and what Nigerians want. Therefore, it is sheer hypocrisy to expect 'signs and wonders' from the Nigeria Police. However, the following challenges have rendered them unproductive.

Politicization of recruitment and promotion: After the amalgamation of the Hausa and Lagos constabularies, the remnants that could not be absorbed into the Nigerian Army were the ones that formed the nucleus of the Nigeria Police Force in 1930 (Obasanjo, 1987). To worsen the matter, history repeated itself in 1970, after the Nigeria civil war, when some of those conscripted into the Nigeria Army to prosecute the war and could not be retained in the Army after the war were also absorbed into the Force. No wonder, the public is not getting the desired results from the 'never do well' set of people. More importantly, the recruiting exercise over the years have been largely politicized; that is to say, godfatherism has become the order of the day rather than merit. For example, the mass recruitment into the Force between 2000 and 2004 without following due process has made it possible for criminals, semi-illiterates and people with doubtful characters to be recruited into the Force (The Nation, 2007). In addition, some of the officers have been on the same rank for many years without promotion or letter of commendation for courageous officers so as to serve as impetus to other serving policemen to emulate such performance. This sometimes leads to deep frustration and the tendency not to put in their best into the jobs.

Poor Remuneration: As the Nigerian economy improves, the prosperity level and property of individuals have continued to bulge. There are persons who drive expensive cars and wear costly clothes, such that when they step out of their cars, they, together with their

jewelries and dresses added up are to several millions of naira as they go. The most unfortunate and worrisome aspect of it is that man entrusted with the protection of a wealthy man and the man stationed on the highway to ensure security of mobile wealth is poorly paid and poorly equipped, hence, the Force is not alive to its responsibilities.

Bribery and Corruption: Human beings are rational animals who make decisions in the face of challenges and options. When funds are inadequate to execute programmes and projects, government officials tend to see it only fit for embezzlement. The same thing is applicable to the Force, when weapons are scarce, the policeman may be tempted to use it to achieve evil means. This subsequently brings us to the question of bribery and corruption in the Police Force for whom they are crucified, derided and rejected. Nigerians have failed to ask why this culture is not dying in spite of the mechanism put in place by the government to check the ‘monster’ through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC). Is there nothing wrong why almost every policeman ends up collecting bribes and perverting justice. Why has every effort to sanitize the police against it failed in our country? Is the fault not in us? It is our considered view that the Nigeria Police Force is one of us; the same veins, the same heart, the same blood.

If exposed to the same situation, are we sure we would not behave exactly like our brother – policeman? He loves integrity just like any of us, he loves self-respect too but how much of this can we honestly say we have given to the police? Therefore, it means that there is nothing ingrained in the blood of the Nigerian policeman that makes him a greedy corrupt person but there must be so much that we have failed to do to make him a true servant of the people. For example, can we say that our leaders lived by example? If the policemen watch a man enters office as a pauper with faded cloths only for him to leave office after four years with ten houses and endless stream of sophisticated cars, how would such a policeman see patriotism as a virtue? This aptly describes the way and manner some of our so-called leaders are living their lives today. A force under this situation cannot but fail.

Poor funding: The poor state of training facilities in the Nigeria Police is worrisome. Many if not all the police camp grounds are in a very devastating state of development. Even the most poorly focal person could see and detest the so call police barracks. It would be much better if they live in swamps than live in such ramshackle and disorganized structures. The Nigeria Police is grossly under-funded. In other climes, such organization entrusted with such big responsibilities is often regarded as important servant of the State, highly motivated, highly trained and re-trained and adequately equipped by providing sufficient fund for them but the reverse is the case in Nigeria. Sufficient funds are not always made available to the Force to enable it meet the ever increasing challenges springing up on daily basis to ensure an excellent policing of the country. If at all the funds are made available, it will not be judiciously put to use. It is a notorious fact that the budgetary allocation of the entire Police Force in 1999 before the advent of this present democratic government was just four billion naira (N4b) (Ogunleye, 2003). An amount that was

grossly inadequate. Lack of fund has actually led to lack of functional fingerprint – screening devices, ballistic analysis, Close Circuit Television (CCTV), forensic and other scientific aids to investigation, among others, which has made non-resolution of cases and human rights violation inevitable.

Shortage of Personnel: The present number of the officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force is grossly inadequate to ensure an efficient policing for the teeming population of about one hundred and sixty million (people). The present work force of the Nigeria Police is only one hundred and fifty thousand (150,000) (Ogunleye, 2003). Going by simple arithmetic, one policeman is expected to effectively provide security for over one thousand people of different backgrounds, status and characters. This is a tall dream that is not only impossible but unrealistic as policemen who have attained the mandatory age of retirement leave the Force every day not to talk of those who die from attacks from criminals, sickness and road accidents. The police is highly respected and regarded elsewhere that most countries strive to reduce the ratio of a policeman to citizens. This is because the less the number of citizens a policeman is required to (secure), the more effective the task. In a country like Nigeria where a policeman is expected to take care of about one thousand people, the result can only be catastrophic. Other Challenges include indiscipline among the rank and file, lack of motivation, defective legal system, lack of adequate training, tribalism and nepotism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has been able to establish the fact that an analysis of the operations of the Nigeria Police over the years shows the effect its colonial origin has on its practices. This shows the fact that history had a reflection on how and why the Nigeria Police behave the way they do. It also highlights some of the good qualities of a policeman and their expected roles in the democratic society. However, it is very important to know that there is disparity between the expectations of the public and what the Force is actually doing. The reasons for this abnormality was also thoroughly discussed and it concludes by suggesting that all hands must be on deck for the Nigeria Police Force to justify the purpose of its existence.

However, in spite of the challenges and/or constraints faced by the Nigeria Police, it is on record that they are among the best in the world. When on foreign mission, the Nigeria Police has always excelled because of motivation. The Force has always thrived where Police from other nations fretted and failed. If that should be the case, the federal government of Nigeria should provide conducive work environment for functional policing to thrive before pointing accusing fingers at those bad officers. More essentially, Nigerians must change their attitudes towards the police if anything meaningful is to be achieved in the security template. We cannot treat Police Force like pigs and expect them to perform like tigers. Hence, the following suggestions are made:

- i Provision of adequate fund to enable the Force to meet its constitutional responsibility. This option should be vigorously pursued because one cannot discount or economize on security;

- i Recruitment and training of more competent hands into the Force;
- iii Bribery and corruption should be seriously tackled in Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria as a whole;
- iv The legal system should be totally overhauled;
- v Appointment and promotion should be based on merit and not politics
- vi Discipline should be the order of the day within the Force;
- vii The rank and file should always be motivated as it is done in other climes;
- viii Security education and general re-orientation of the public towards the Police Force should be an issue of great concern.

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