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## **THE ROLE OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE IN MAINTAINING PEACE AND SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

***Timbee Akuul***

*Department of Political Science  
Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria  
e-mail:timbeeakuul@yahoo.co.uk*

### **ABSTRACT**

The Nigerian police force is a security outfit of the Nigerian state established to combat crime and ensure security of lives and property of the citizenry. Experience over the years has shown that the force has lived below expectation. Some of the reasons explaining this failure include corruption, delayed justice, impartiality among others. This has made the people to see the police as an enemy rather than a friend. This paper contends that if crime is to be combated to guarantee security of the citizens, government should restructure the force to instil into it more positive values that could ensure more effective service delivery to the masses.

***Keywords: Role, Nigeria, Police Force, Peace, Security.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Societies all over the world expand and develops continuously, as such human relationship and activities also expands. The results of dynamism of the growing population give room for crime. These societies therefore strive to establish and develop institutions that can ensure peace as well as security of lives and property of its citizenry. This is also true of the Nigerian state where the Nigerian Police Force as an institution has been established by law and given the responsibility to protect the citizens and ensure peace and stability within the Nigerian polity. However, several decades after its creation or formation, the goal of achieving peace and security through the force has not been realised. Several factors may be responsible for this failure of the Nigerian police in combating crime and ensuring peace and security. Some of these factors are poor funding, remuneration, corruption, lack of equipments to mention just a few. This paper takes the challenge to examine critically the various impediments or obstacles that, collectively or independently affects effective performance of the Police Force and also suggest ways of overcoming these problems in order to have a society where peace and security of citizens can be guaranteed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

An analysis of police and policing in Nigeria can be done by a careful delineation of the two concepts: Police and Policing. Police refers to a socio-political and quasi-legal institution charged with the responsibility of enforcing criminal law and the maintenance of law and order. Then policing is the measures and actions taken by a variety of institutions and groups (both formal and non-formal) in the society to regulate social relations and practice in order to secure the safety of members of community as well as conformity to the norms and values of society. It is therefore a sub-set of control processes which involves the creation of system of surveillance coupled with the threat of sanction for discovered deviance (Reiner,

2000). To sufficiently examine the police, policing and peace and security, the political economy approach shall be used in the analysis. The most popular strand of political economy which shall be used for this work is the Marxist Model. The main arguments of this theory is summarised by Marx (1970) that in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will. These relations could be relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of material forces of production. The totality of these relations constitutes the economic structure of the society. Marx also argued strongly that, the economic structure of society determines the character of the superstructure which includes the political, legal, cultural and religious relations and institutions of society. Applying this model to police and policing in Nigeria, the theory suggest that the problems of order, law and lawlessness as well as security can be understood as a reflection of the economic system we have, especially the dominant interests that drives it. However, societies are constituted into classes and groups with varying degrees of power or influence over political and economic decisions. Classes and groups with dominant economic power control political decision-making, including the enactment of criminal law by the legislature, its enforcement and interpretation by the police and judiciary respectively.

There are also common grounds on police and policing between the political economy theorist and social conflicts theorists. These groups argues that society is divided into groups and classes with common interests in some areas and conflicting interests in many areas including the organisation, mobilisation and distribution of economic and socio-political resources. But generally they argue that the police were not created to serve "society" or the "people" but to serve some parts of society and some people at the expense of others" (Institute for the Study of Labour and Economic Crisis 1982:12). The role of Police therefore varies across societies with different political and economic organisations. Similarly, Bowden (1978:19) argues that the role of the Nigerian police force includes the repression of the poor and the powerless in order to protect the interest of the rulers. The police therefore stand as buffers between elite and masses. A holistic view of the police therefore is that police force represses and at the same time serves the public. The priority attached to repression and service only varies across societies and even regimes within a society (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria police). Consequently police roles and performance in ensuring security must be seen as the product of interactions among political, economic, legal, institutional and personality factors. And generally, police bureaucracies are organized to detect, investigate, sort out, sieve, arrest, detain, prosecute, and harass those considered to be dangerous for the preservation of the status- quo. But as Carter and Rodelet, In Etannihi, Alemika and Chukwuma(2002) argues "the police are part of and not apart of the communities they serve".

The Nigerian political economy for instance is characterised by a dependency on a mono-product (Petroleum), rent-seeking by the rulers, wide spread corruption, wide inequality and mass poverty, high rate of unemployment at all levels, low capacity utilisation, high import, dependent level in both capital and consumer goods, high external and domestic debt portfolios. As a result of these conditions, there has been steady decline in the availability,

quality and affordability of social welfare goods and services such as education, health care, etc and increase in wide spread insecurity ethnic and religious conflicts. All these political and economic crises have impact on the Nigerian police. The pressures from the despotic rulers to curb and crush opposition and curtail rising crimes cannot be over-emphasized. This often manifest in lack of resources, embargo on recruitment and promotion for several years, victimisation and nepotism. The Nigerian police embrace a culture of impunity since their take home pay can no longer take them home. As a result, extra-judicial killings, detention without trials, corruption, harassment of innocent citizens on check points, becomes wide spread and a norm. The inability of the police to maintain law and order becomes glaring as cases of armed robbery involving sophisticated weapons are rampant. All these are a clear indication of how the Nigerian economy has determined the operation of the Nigeria Police Force.

### **Historical Background of the Nigerian Police Force**

Like any other structure or institution, the Nigerian Police Force has a history. Its history in Nigeria particularly dates back to 1861 during colonial era, when the consul of Lagos colony established a consular guard of thirty members to watch over the colonial properties. This guard grew in size and was later known as the Hausa constabulary. This was because it was dominated by Northerners. In 1896 the Lagos police was established. A similar force was already formed in Calabar in 1894 known as the Niger Coast Constabulary. And in the North too, the Royal Niger Company set up Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888. In the early 1900's when the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were proclaimed, part of the Royal Niger Company constabulary became the Northern Nigeria Police and part of Nigeria Coast Constabulary became the Southern Nigeria Police. Although the South and North were amalgamated in 1914, their police forces were not merged until in 1930, with headquarters in Lagos. It is important to also note that during colonial period, most police were associated with local government (Native authorities). But by 1960's under the first Republic, these forces were regionalised and then nationalised. By this Nationalisation of the Nigeria Police Force, the Inspector General of Police was in control of the general operation and administrative duties. He was supported at the headquarters by a deputy Inspector General and in each state by Police Commissioners. The 1999 constitution also provided for a Police Service Commission that is today responsible for Policy, organisation, administration and finance of the Nigerian police force.

### **The Roles of Nigerian Police Force**

Traditionally, policing was the responsibility of all adults in community. In medieval society, all male adults were obliged to contribute towards the prevention and control of crime and disorder under the system "hue, cry and pursuit". But the emergence of the state, with its vast bureaucracies anchored on centralisation, hierarchical authority/power structure, and professionalism changed the traditional policing method of policing being every one's business (Weber 1968). The emergence of an entity with its claim to the monopoly over the means of legitimate violence in society resulted into the creation of specialized agencies such as police and the Armed Forces charged with the responsibility of controlling the use of

violence by other groups. By this therefore police was scheduled to perform the following responsibilities or duties:

- i. Prevention of crime
- ii. Protection of lives and properties
- iii. Enforcing law
- iv. Maintenance of peace and public order.
- v. Providing a wide range of services to the citizens. By doing this it has the potential for violence and right to use coercive means in order to establish social control (Bitner, 1970).

According to Yecho (2004), the Nigeria Police is statutory required to fight crime through detection, investigation, apprehension and prosecution of offenders in law court and the protection of lives and property through proactive policing. To Tinubu (1993) the place of police in Nigeria can not be compromised. Their constitutional and statutory functions according to him are well defined so that the force can manage crisis situation, maintain peace and security.

### **Efforts of the Nigerian Police Force in Ensuring Peace and Security**

The Nigerian government has acknowledged the problems militating against effective performance of the Nigeria Police Force as postulated above. In contemporary times therefore, it appears there are growing efforts in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the Police Force towards the maintenance of peace and security in Nigeria. For example, from the late 1990's to date, the Nigerian Police Force has embarked on several measures of fighting crime some of which includes: Operation Sweep, Operation Flush, Operation Fire for Fire, Anti-crime Patrol, Operation Dzenda to mention a few have been introduced. All these are efforts to ensure peace. However, it can be argued that these measures have not been able to attain the desired aims and objectives. This calls for a critical examination of the roles of the Nigerian Police Force in order to assess its efficiency, effectiveness and service delivery towards peace and order in the society. The aim is to understand what contributions each of these measures have made towards ensuring peace and security. Some of these measures are:

**Operation Fire for Fire Crime Control Programme:** Operation Fire for Fire came into existence at a time when the security situation in Nigeria had assumed a dangerous dimension as the use of sophisticated weapons by armed robbers became high as manifested in political assassinations. During this time, the Former Attorney General of the Federation chief Bola Ige was murdered in December 2001, Barr. Mrs. Igwe in September 2002, Chief Harry Marshal, Alhaji Isiaku Mohammend among others were also assassinated (Balogun 2004). All these no doubt came, about as a result of proliferation of arms and ammunition. Against this background the then Inspector General of Police Mr. Tafa Balogun on assumption of duty adopted an 8-point crime control strategy called "Operation Fire for Fire" as a proactive measure of fighting crime and ensuring peace and security in Nigeria. This approach could not yield maximum impact because the control of illegal possession of fire arms by individuals (thugs and hoodlums etc) was not put in place. However, the programme

was able to achieve in certain areas. For instance, Operation fire for fire arrested a notorious Benin Republic armed robber Tijani Hamani. By this operation, the Police Force was also able to check trans-border crimes. Also the aim of this programme was to counter and dislodge ethnic militia that constituted themselves into parallel forces, and whose activities had become serious threat to the peace, security and unity of the country. But funny enough ethnic militia like movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB) Oodua People Congress (OPC) etc has continued to strive.

**The Role of Serve and To Protect with Integrity Programme:** The removal of Tafa Balogun as Inspector General of Police marked the death of "Operation Fire for Fire" and in its place a new concept of fighting crime control known as "serve and to protect with integrity" was introduced. This programme was not only meant to fight crime but also to redeem the battered image of the Police Force. It was formally launched as the Nigeria Police Force Action Programme that should form a guiding principle of the Police Force in discharging their duties. As stated by the 10-point programme of action in 2005, the programme had plan of action that touches on all the nooks and cranny of Nigerian security from types of social disorder to the composition of police personnel down to the social relations with the public. It was aimed at effective crime control through intelligence led policing, conflict prevention and resolution, community policing and police partnership, zero tolerance for police corruption and indiscipline among others.

The programme never the less uplifted the working condition of the Police Force as their take home pay was increased and paid promptly too. Recruitment and promotion of personnel was no longer cumbersome and frustrating as it used to be and the people (both public and police officers) started appreciating the institution as compared to what used to be. In spite of these achievements, the programme could not manage crime and insecurity in the country rather this period witnessed the highest level of crime and instability. Armed robbery became a royal carrier and People took pleasure in advance fee fraud (419). Cult activities also heightened because they were not confronted by the police any longer. In Benue State for instance Operation Dzenda which is a joint security team comprising of the Army, Civil Defence and the Police Force aimed at combating crime and ensuring security most especially in the rural areas. Cars are distributed to them and logistics put in place in every local government area in the state. This team is doing much by combating crime and cultism. But at the same time, some politicians are using them to fight opposition particularly those in executive positions. Also rather than routine patrol in border and rural areas, they tend to mount road blocks on roads extorting money from the public particularly on market days. This act has affected their performance greatly and to some extent the aim of the programme itself.

Going by this inconsistency of the Nigeria Police Force in combating crime and ensuring security of lives and property, one is left with nothing but doubts as to what will happen next in the mist of ethno-religious crisis, illegal possession of fire arms, poverty and unemployment and political thuggery. Indeed, the security of lives and properties of Nigerians is up till now at the mercy of God.

## **PROBLEMS OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE**

The Nigerian Police over the years has not been able to effectively carry out its functions. This is largely due to the following reasons:

**Corruption and Extortion:** Corruption and extortion are wide spread among the members of the Nigeria Police Force. This practice has greatly soiled the image of the police. Agreeing to this worrisome issue, Alemika (1999:10) argues that police corruption is a serious issue because they are expected to be moral as law enforcement agents. If the police which are employed to prevent and detect corruption or crime and bring culprits to judgement are themselves corrupt, then the society is at risk. Similarly, the police exercise powers that have great implications on the lives, properties and safety of citizens. Where such power is contaminated by corrupt tendencies, then the citizens are insecure. This corruption also manifest in extortion which is a form of robbery. Corruption on the part of the police explains why the public is threatened by such practices, and hence the police are not capable of living up to expectation. According to Alemika (1999), in many cases police brutality is a means of coercing individuals to succumb to demands for bribes and sometimes it is punishment for not cooperating with the police in their demand for gratification.

**Lack of Proper Resource Management:** This practice has also greatly impacted negatively on the police efficiency. These management inadequacies according to Alemika (1997), Osaba (1994), and Balogun (2003) are critical in the aspects of manpower, both in quantity and in quality. That is, the quality of police personnel some of who cannot write or speak well affects the performance of the force. The available resources allocated to them are also mismanaged. He also posits that poor crime and operational information management, including inaccurate recording and collation of information, inadequate analysis and infrequent publication of statistics affect the performance of the police force.

**Inadequate Funding and Poor Remuneration:** Under normal circumstances, the Police Force is supposed to be paid well so that they don't lack. Most police officers indulge in collecting bribes because of their meagre take home. They are not adequately funded and this is evidenced in their inadequate office and poor residential accommodation. This problem is not peculiar to the police alone. It is indeed a general problem in Nigeria.

**Inadequate Arms and Ammunition:** The Nigeria Police Force has inadequate arms, logistics, telecommunication gadgets and transportation facilities. The police needs to be empowered with sophisticated weapons so that if confronted with criminals or armed robbers who usually have sophisticated weapons, they will be able to withstand them. However, the police should be restricted to the use of these arms as a last resort. Lamenting on the inadequacy of arms as a critical factor for police failure, Daudu (2008) had this to say, "Nigerian police are helpless, when confronted with armed robbers, these boys have sophisticated machines that the police cannot deal with" (Tell magazine, May, 2008).

**Lack of Integrity:** Integrity is a fundamental principle of public officers. It guides one's conduct in discharging official duties. The Nigerian Police Force for example lacks integrity. The officers have no respect for the job, they are highly unreliable, and often demonstrate this by involvement in crime or collusion with criminals. In their routine work, they tend to protect the rich. Their status is often used to oppress their fellow citizens through bribery, blackmail and intimidation. Daudu (2008) also captured this thus "the police as far as I am concerned is a disgrace to Nigerians, they commit terrible things... imagine police will kill innocent person and claim the following day that he was found stealing.

**Police Brutality and Harassment of Innocent Citizens:** This is another major obstacle to the prospects of the Nigerian Police in guaranteeing security of lives and property, law and order. With the backing of autocratic leaders and repressive laws the police often acted outside the rule of law. The police have in most cases been laws themselves, killing innocent people, detaining persons arbitrary and with impunity. Political opponents of governments, workers, student's radicals and human rights activist have always suffered excessive waves of brutalities, abductions, unwarranted searches and violations of privacy, extra-judicial killings, bodily injury and intimidation, harassment and loss of personal liberties in the hands of police.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the history and character of the Nigerian Police Force and Policing in the country as derived from the nature of the economic system, obviously the police force is confronted with a lot of problems since the colonial era. These challenges are in the area of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency in the detection, prevention and control of crime, apprehension and prosecution of offenders, scrupulous observance of the rule of law and concern for the general welfare of the citizens it protects. Also, the significance of police as either facilitators or inhibitors of pro-poor change initiative is largely dependent on the nature and character of the inherent society or economic system. The Nigerian Police Force is therefore a reflection of the Nigerian state. This explains why measures in fighting crime often fail. This calls for a restructuring of the force to instil positive values in order to ensure effective service delivery on the part of the police force.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Nigerian Police is an institution that is statutory scheduled with the responsibility of ensuring peace and security of Nigerians. It is an indispensable institution of social control and maintenance of peace and stability. The role of the force therefore cannot be under mind. It is on this basis that the following recommendations are made:

- i. The act of policing should not be left in the hands of the Nigerian police force alone. States and other organs like the traditional institution, the clergy and civil organizations should be actively involved.
- ii. The Police Force should be well equipped to perform its functions well and in compliance with the rule of law.

- iii. Presently, the police are highly and visibly subservient to the rich and powerful politicians. Policies should be put in place to withdraw police men attached to these politicians.
- iv. Sensitization exercise should be taken as a priority in addressing relationship that exists between the public and personnel of the Nigerian police force.
- v. As a matter of urgency, police personnel who are no longer productive as well as those who are corrupt should be retrenched and more skilled youths be injected into the system.

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