

# The Nigerian Police and National Security

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The rising incidences of kidnappings, assassinations, terrorism and other acts of violence across Nigeria has elicited critical questions from Nigerians bordering on the readiness of the country's security forces to rise up to the mounting threats posed to the lives and property of fellow Nigerians. These questions became pertinent in the wake of the preventable loss of lives and destruction of properties running into billions that have become sad markers of the country's evolution over the years; unfortunate occurrences that are being blamed on the inability of the country's security operatives to effectively do their jobs.

Of all the security organizations operating within the shores of the country, the Nigerian Police Force has received the hardest knocks. This is not surprising, since the police – among other security organizations – is the closest to the people. As the chief custodian of law and order, protector of lives and properties and averter of crimes in the society, the police force has been naturally blamed for the country's gradual descent into anarchy, as it is viewed as having failed in properly discharging its core duties to the Nigerian people. With the fearless and flagrant manner violent groups continue to run amok across the country, the NPF and its operatives continue to score the lowest grades in national opinion ratings.

However, the crude censorships the police, in the wake of recent events, are quite unfair, considering the fact that other security organizations in the country, having performed equally poorly, should also share in the blame. Just like the police, the military, the State Security Services, in tandem with other security agencies and other Para-military organizations in the country have also failed in their duties. National security is not the duty of the police alone – although it has a crucial part to play – It consists of a compendium of relationships among plethora of actors or parties all working for the common national interest. The police force – like other security organizations – is just a party in this wide gamut of relationships. (These personal opinions do not in any way constitute tacit support for the police force – we all know its shortcomings – but are objective observations of a largely misunderstood issue.)

Considering the limited resources at its disposal, the purported inability of the NPF to perform to full capacity should be seen as a function of the institutional structures it has been forced to operate in. Despite these debilitating inhibitions, the NPF has managed to churn out series of outstanding achievements over the years, ranging from: Control of the Tiv Unrest in the early 1960s; control of the Bakolori riots of 1982; control of several communal clashes in the country, such as Bauchi (1985), Zango-Kataf (1992), Ogoni (1994-96), Warri (19997-1999), etc; control of several religious riots in the country, like the Maitatsine uprising in Kano (1980), Bulunkutu and Maiduguri (1982), Yola (1983), etc; cooperation with International Police (INTERPOL) on crime control; several

peace keeping missions; training of police forces of sister countries, etc (Nwolise B.C.O, The Nigerian Police in International Peace-Keeping under the United Nations, 2004; Pg 95-96). These successes were recorded under very risky circumstances as the force lacked the required equipment and other significant resources to intervene in such high intensity conflicts.

On the other hand, the police has recorded some failures ranging from: its inability to unravel the culprits behind several assassinations and bombings of prominent Nigerian citizens over the years, starting with the parcel bombing of Mr. Dele Giwa, the late Chief Editor of News Watch Magazine; inability of the police to properly manage some student riots and demonstrations by other unarmed protesters without resorting to the use of naked force; inability of the force to transform itself into a people-friendly organization; inability of the force to transform itself into a service-oriented organization in practice, rather than the forceful face it still bears; inability of the force to stay politically neutral, etc. But like I mentioned earlier, these shortcomings should be assessed from the perspective of the operationally encumbrances that have traditionally bedeviled the ability of the force to perform to full capacity.

However, some of the challenges that have militated against the ability of the NPF to satisfactorily perform its functions to the core includes: inadequate manpower, which has made it practically impossible to adequately police a country as highly populated and expansive as Nigeria; inadequate and obsolete equipment – especially communication gadgets, arms, and ammunitions – which reduces the speed of responding to distress calls and passing information across to other units; poor remuneration, which has tends to deflate the morale of officers, and confronts those with weak willpower with extortionist temptations; inadequate public cooperation, which has restricts access to crucial intelligence; poor and inadequate accommodation facilities for both office and residential use; mobility challenges, which makes it difficult to respond to distress calls and carry out patrols; activities of bad eggs, which has tended to give the force a negative public image; inadequate training, etc.

It's the writer's humble opinion that if the above challenges facing the force are speedily addressed by the Nigerian Government, the NPF will be better equipped to begin to contribute its quota to the security of the Nigerian State and its people. Considering the increasing sophistication of most violent groups, a police force as underfunded, ill-equipped, poorly staffed, poorly remunerated as the NPF cannot cope with the onerous task of safeguarding the lives and properties of the citizens of a country as complex and vast as Nigeria. Acts of violence by groups such as terrorists and criminal cartels are now carried out with a combination of unorthodox and clandestine styles that are becoming more difficult to detect or fight. There is an urgent need for a total redress of the aforementioned anomalies together with other much needed reforms in the security sector as a whole, for the police and other security agencies in the country to begin to live up to their billings as the guarantors of peace and security within the borders of Nigeria.

However, the rot in the NPF is simply a minute reflection of the general systems failure afflicting the Nigerian project; a mirror image of a much bigger problem. It requires an enquiry into the structural/background factors responsible for the supposed laxity in the country's security sector as a whole for proper remedies to be found. The commendable performance of the NPF in all the foreign Peace-keeping Missions (Congo, 1960-65; Namibia, 1989-1990; Angola, 1991-1998; Croatia, 1995-1996; Western Sahara, 1991; Mozambique, 1993-1994; Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992-1993, 1993-1994; Somalia, 1993-1995; Rwanda, 1993-1996; Macedonia, 1995; Yugoslavia, 1992-95, 1999) (Ibid; Pgs 122, 166) it has participated in over the years, is testament of what it can do when properly propped up.

The Nigerian Police Force is simply the unfortunate victim of the tradition of buck-passing in a country peopled by individuals who will never accept it when they have failed. Let's do the right things and stop blaming the police for what is obviously a collective national failure