

STATE POLICE: THE ALTERNATIVE POLICE POWER FOR NIGERIA'S INTERNAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Police are professional officers specially trained in the art of detecting, monitoring and checkmating commission of crimes in society. The police personnel remain the main arm of any modern government for the maintenance of internal security. Nigeria is a federation comprising federating units in the form of State governments distinct from the federal government at the centre. Ever since the transformation of police in Nigeria into a modern police system, the Nigeria Police Force have had to contend, of late, more than ever, with serious internal security challenges such as kidnappings, assassinations, herdsmen attacks, mass killings and wholesale destruction of villages. The reality of the State of affairs revealed that the police have essentially failed in discharging their prime obligation of maintaining maximum law and order measured by security of lives and property of the citizens. This research used the doctrinal method with the objective of showing the weaknesses or failure of the present police structure in Nigeria that is centrally organized and controlled by the federal authority vis-à-vis security of lives and property. This work pointed out the necessity of decentralizing the police system in Nigeria by the introduction of State Police by the federated states towards enhancing security objectives. It ended by drawing conclusion from the discourse and proffering certain recommendations towards realizing maximum security generally in Nigeria by adopting the State Police alternative to the unitary and centrally-controlled policing role by the Federal Government alone.

Keywords: Police, State, Security, Nigeria, Power, Vigilante, Policing.

Introduction

The police as the martial arm of government is very important for the maintenance of internal security, law and order. This is on the premise that a society can only make meaningful progress and development under an atmosphere of peace, law and orderliness within its boundaries. This is the duty the Nigeria Police have had to square up with even to the present time. Whether the Nigeria Police have substantially succeeded in this onerous obligation or not, shall soon be seen in this work. In order to enhance better understanding of this discourse, relevant terms shall be explained; after which brief history of the Nigeria Police would be given. Thereafter, attempt shall be made to show the weaknesses of the centrally-controlled policing system in Nigeria as occasioning the failure of the police to deliver on their core mandate – protection of lives and property in the current Nigerian society. Furthermore, the advantages of the alternative state police option for Nigeria's internal security challenges would be expressed, and why this alternative policing system should be adopted by Nigeria. Finally, conclusion would be drawn from the discourse and recommendations made for attaining appreciable level of maintaining and enhancing internal security situation through this alternative State Police structure.

The Weaknesses and Unsuitability of the Centrally-Controlled Nigeria Police Force

They are itemized as follows:

- a. Far from the People

- b. Non-conversant with the environment
- c. Insufficient manpower
- d. Apparent failure to offer maximum security
- e. Negates true federalism

Suitability of State Police:

Institutionalization of Grassroot Policing,

Modern societies are quite complex and highly knowledgeable just as crimes have taken different dimensions even at the most rural areas. State Police anchored on locals or indigenes and non-indigenes that must have resided in the particular State for a minimum of 10 years would be in a very good stead in policing the area effectively. This is on the basis that the bulk of the police officers are drawn from people of the area of assignment and live among the people. State police driven by local citizens of the State are thus seen as “insiders” by the populace in the area of their operation since majority of them are indigenes by birth or might have acquainted themselves with the people by long period of co-existence and creating familiarity along the line. This is contrasted with a non-indigene police officers, especially from another state, and worse still, from different geo-political zone in Nigeria who would always be seen as an “outsider” or “foreigner” in the midst of people he/she is supposed to be familiar with in order to succeed as a police officer.

Familiarity with Local Environment

Successful crime fighting and policing cannot be divorced from informed and wide knowledge of the area in question. Where the police officers, as local citizens of the state and area of primary assignment, hardly would a criminal escape arrest even when the culprit has dashed into a bush in an attempt to escape. This is because, since the officers know the terrain, both entrance and exit outlets, short cut routes and expected terminal points, they would pursue the criminal and eventually arrest the person. Such would not be the case where a non-indigene from one State posted to serve in another State who meets such a scenario. Once a fleeing criminal ran into a forest, the non-indigene police officers pursuing the person would conclude that the criminal has escaped and report back to their superior as the end of the matter. On the other hand, what if a local gang of criminals have their operational base in a very thick and dangerous forest? How easy would non-indigenous police officers dare enter the forest to confront such criminal gang? Such instances as above can only be tackled or confronted successfully by locals who are conversant with the terrain, spy on them and make bold and direct confrontation.

Freedom of States to recruit and equip enough police officers

A pivotal factor for the obvious police failure in enhancing effective security has to do with shortage of manpower as earlier noted. State Police would quickly overcome such problem as each state would be free to recruit commensurate police personnel within its financial resources. This will be an improvement on the present situation. This inadequate manpower in the Nigeria Police Force is further exacerbated with being ill-equipped to confronting contemporary hardened criminals often with better arms than the regular police. In such sorry state, the police cannot be expected to work magic in being ubiquitous and fighting criminals with virtually bare hands, thus endangering the lives of the officers. However, it is public knowledge that many state governors hugely support police commands in their various states especially through purchase of new brand patrolling vans, cars, communication gadgets and so forth. Also some wealthy and charitable citizens in some states had built or renovated police stations/posts towards providing the police with better working environment. In the light of the foregoing, State police would enhance opportunity of rapidly filling the gap in the manpower shortage and being better equipped than where we are at the moment for effective policing.

State Police inspires uncommon nationalism to excel

While it is conceded that the Nigeria Police Force is committed to its professional duty of policing the society, as some exploits of the members show, State police, without fear of contradiction, would trigger and inspire uncommon and unparalleled nationalism in the course of protecting the lives of the citizenry. This is even so when daring tantamount to suicidal option. This is on account of the knowledge and feeling of being an integral part of the society and blood ties with likely victims of any attack. This sensibility and attachment would certainly be lacking in officers from another section of the country

working in an area they are completely disconnected with the people by these vital and compelling factors.

Godogodo people of Jema'a Local Government Area, Kaduna State furnish quite illustrative practicality of this assertion. Determined to defend and protect the lives of their people after being tricked by soldiers monitoring their area to do away with their dane guns on the pretext of impending search for arms by military from other formation, only for murderous attacks to be launched on their people about 30 minutes later, the local vigilante members braced the odds in a rare heroism to save their kit and kin from their mortal enemies – “unknown” gunmen.

A vigilante leader in Godogodo was quoted as saying:

As soon as I heard that they (Fulani herdsmen) made away with two rifles, I knew that an invasion of any of our villages was inevitable ... We have heard that Fulani were massing for a serious attack on Godogodo and other places and we told the police and soldiers that we were working with ... It was said that they came from Nasarrawa State and some from Plateau State to team up with those already on ground and hiding in our deserted villages. On our part, we called in some vigilante from other tribes, and they came. So when we heard about the gun taken from the Police, we knew it was a matter of time.

Another vigilante said:

We were sitting around, talking and exchanging jokes, when the soldier who in charge of the seven soldiers guiding [sic] Godogodo approached us ... He and his troops were in their pick up van and came over to us. We went to a side where he said that he had important information to tell us. He said that soldiers from another formation were coming to search Godogodo for firearms. That if any of us had any guns, we must immediately remove them to a safer place, since they were on their way. He said he did not want to be seen as aiding them to bear arms. It was around 5:30pm last Saturday. He left with his soldiers. Some of us, who had hunting guns or den [sic] guns ran and took them into hiding. We even called those that were not around to come get their stuff out ... Then exactly by 6pm, it was not even dark yet, when we heard gun shots from the side of Unguwan Ninzom part of the town. That part of the town is the most vulnerable, because our people (native and non native Christians) live there and the place stretches far outwards from the town.

He continued, thus:

The Fulani gunmen usually don't touch Hausa people and their property. We're their prime targets, because they say our villagers have now become their grazing reserves and we must give way. *Then there were more gunshots. That was when we it [sic] dawned on us that we have been tricked. There were no police, no soldiers and we do not have what it would take to defend ourselves. Some of us, with only cutlasses, machetes and sticks tried to reach the source of the shooting, but it was a clear suicide attempt.* I saw them gun down three boys. I ducked and crawled into a ditch before running away. Women and children were screaming. Within a few minutes they started burning houses. You could even see them from a far. Fulani men with AK 47. We were running helter-skelter, rescuing the elders, children and women to outskirts of the town. The Hausa part of the town was spared, so we directed those who escaped to run through the Hausa side to safety. We were also making frantic calls to everyone who could help. By 8pm, from where some of us were hiding, there were still people sneaking out to safety, but the wailing of those trapped in their homes had stopped. They had either been killed, or roasted alive in the inferno.

The vigilante concluded thus:

I don't know when the police or soldiers returned, because we had wondered [sic] into the bush with women and children and eventually walked them to Gidan Waya. We arrived Gidan Waya around 1am on Sunday. The killings continued on Sunday morning. We heard that the police came, but were over powered. If we had not been

deceived to do away with our weapons, I can assure that it could have been fire-for-fire. We have written officially to the police and the Nigeria Army about this.

Prior to this particular incident, the Nigerian Army had noted the bravery and gallantry of these vigilance members in securing and defending their homelands from these lawless gunmen alongside the Nigerian Army. The Army said:

Gallant troops of 1 Division Nigerian Army in a joint operation with personnel of Nigeria Police and Local vigilantes have today repelled a coordinated attack by gunmen on Godogodo town of Kaduna State. The troops fought off the attackers and pursued them into the bush, inflicting heavy casualty on them. Unfortunately, four local vigilantes lost their lives while another 9 were wounded in the course of countering the dastardly attack meant to cause more loss of lives and properties of law abiding citizens of Godogodo town ... The following Fulani were arrested: Lawal Gambo, Yau Sani, Bala Amodu, Ibrahim Maikaru, Abubakar Hassan and Bashiru Isa Ciroma in the cause [sic] of the encounter.

A writer summarized the high degree of nationalism of the Godogodo vigilance team in defending their territory, and rightly so, when he declared:

That was as much as the ill-trained, poorly armed but highly committed vigilante of Godogodo could go to protecting their homelands.

State Police organized and formed using local vigilance teams as the nucleus will be the most suitable for Nigeria now.

State Police entrenches realistic Federalism and Challenge to Perform

Establishment of State Police by states in Nigeria is a sure way to Nigeria operating federalism as a realistic and suitable form of government given our heterogeneous socio-cultural background. Such a situation in real terms would, in addition, pose tough challenge to the various states to perform maximally especially in the area of maintaining internal security going by our present circumstances and challenges.

The unified Police structure in Nigeria as presently constituted have shown incapacity in curtailing and controlling the wave of criminality regarding kidnapping, robbery and herdsmen onslaught against innocent citizens. State police structure would enable every State government to effectively protect citizens within her territory as each structures policing roles and duties having good knowledge of the environment, social habits, prevalent crimes, modes and period of frequent commissions, common language and even coded invented communication parlance and so forth.

Police operating in every State under State Police model, armed with the above knowledge and more, would no doubt be much fruitful in policing roles as opposed to the current centrally-controlled police structure in Nigeria bedeviled by a host of militating factors earlier stated. The anticipated success of police under state police model in Nigeria would bring into view the benefit of realistic and true federalism as a form of government.

Federalism in Nigeria is still evolving. Creation of State Police to tackle internal security challenges of the time would be part of the evolution of federalism in Nigeria. There is no point in time evolution in federalism ceases in any country. It is all about the issue of adjusting and readjusting in creating a conducive, suitable and acceptable framework in governance. As it has been noted elsewhere:

All federations evolve over time. Some have gone through major formal constitutional changes, while others have changed significantly despite largely stable constitutions. Factors such as the creation of new constituent units, urbanization, major demographic and economic shifts, new technologies, major global and domestic political developments, and the experience of democracy have been critical in shaping federal experiences.

Writing on suitability of federalism, George Anderson stated:
“Federalism is not always best, and there is no best version of federalism. Federalism seems particularly suited to democracies with very large populations or territories or with highly diverse populations that are regionally concentrated. Overtime, federalism requires a significant part of the population to have a sense of identity with the whole country, as well as lively and engaged political communities at the regional level”.

There is no doubt that State Police in Nigeria would strengthen the operation of federalism as a realistic and fruitful government in Nigeria.

Enhanced Security triggers boom in Economic Activities.

The gale of criminality in the country against citizens from engaging in their lawful occupations and other activities have no doubt retarded the general awakening in agricultural sector and has downward trend in other critical areas. Endangered areas of activities include the banking sector, transport sector, commercial traders, farming profession among others. Among these, the worst hit is the farming sector by the activities of the Fulani herdsmen in attacking, killing farmers and destroying farm produce. This is followed by commercial traders and transporters taken as one, as in most cases, attack on one sector affects the other.

Fulani herdsmen have attacked and destroyed not less than 30 communities across Nigeria with massive expanse of agricultural farms equally affected. Some of the destruction was by means of burning as in the case of most affect communities of Benue State and Southern Kaduna State; while others were by simply stationing their cattle on pure agricultural plantations like rice, yam, vegetables, cassava and others and allowing their cattle to feed on such plantation. This is more pronounced in Ekiti, Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra States. For example, Eha-Amufu Community in Enugu State has been having constant wrangling, and later fightings with the Fulani herdsmen over allowing their cattle to feed on people's farm plantations at random.

The Fulani herdsmen now constitute serious threat to lives and property of the people. For instance, Mr. James Ogada from Mgbuji Village, Eha-Amufu was arrested and seriously inflicted bodily injuries by Fulani herdsmen who suddenly emerged from the bush and demanded the man's money. When he replied that he had no money on him, the assailants used their rods to hit him on the head and pummeled him badly; searched him and collected whatever money on him before escaping into the bush. A search party by the villagers later yielded some positive result as one of the assailants was caught, taken to Police station where he was made to foot the medical expenses for the treatment and the stolen money recovered from him. This happened about July, 2016. About the same time, a certain woman and her son who were working in their farm were attacked, but before the assailants could use their brandished swords, the woman and her son escaped, abandoning their farm works. When the men folks mobilized and went to confront the herdsmen, they had already escaped with their cows. There is no doubt that these frequent attacks on farmers and destruction of farm plantations seriously constitute a drawback on the economic activities and boom, thus retarding progress and advancement in life.

Adoption of State Policing option would be most suitable and effective in checkmating these wide ranges of criminal activities and thus, pave the way for peace and security necessary for boom in economic activities. The present police system in Nigeria, controlled from the centre, has failed woefully and must be restructured through State Police mechanism.

Conclusion

It is evident from the weaknesses and deficiencies of the federally-controlled police in Nigeria as already shown, that the police institution has failed in checkmating the ever spiraling crime rate in the country. This has unarguably brought about huge destruction of human lives and property of the citizens as well as retardation in economic activities, and the reign of terror and fear across the nation.

The alternative state police model in policing roles was canvassed for the country which promises effective and greater result in policing duties, on the basis of being anchored primarily, on localized grassroot policing. Thus, State Police model is practically the only realistic option for Nigeria in successfully combating the current internal security challenges in the country.

Recommendations

In the light of the preceding discourse with multifaceted internal security challenges confronting the country; and the apparent failure and weakness of the federal-controlled Nigeria Police Force to curtail this criminality and enhance security of lives and property of the citizenry, the following recommendations are made towards redressing these unprecedented dangerous trends:

- i. Immediate adoption of State Policing Model by altering the constitution to make way for States to establish their own police structures. The relevant part of the constitution is section 214 (1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). The section provides *“There shall be a Police Force for Nigeria, which shall be known as the Nigeria Police Force, and subject to the provisions of this section no other Police Force shall be established for the Federation or any part thereof.”* This section effectively precludes the establishment of any other police force in the country either for the federation or any other part or State.
- ii. Vesting of power to control and direct Commissioners of Police in the States generally in the Executive Governors as Chief Security Officers of their various States. This is to avoid the usual wrangling and contest of supremacy between Executive Governors and Commissioners of Police giving directions on deployment of Police Officers for security purposes; or where the police top hierarchy may withdraw police officers from duty posts as a form of political sanction of disagreeable Governors. The cases of Governor Jim Nwobodo v. Bishop Eytene where the latter refused to obey the former’s instruction to deploy police officers for security duties without getting clearance from the Inspector General of Police first; and Governor Chibuike Amaechi of Rivers State’s lamentation that his State was under the siege of Police and other security agencies are illustrative examples. Governor Amaechi complained that the police shut tear gas into Government House while he was outside the premises during a crisis in his State in July 2013, even though the police denied that. To make this realistic, Section 215 of the Constitution has to be amended so that a State Commissioner of Police would not have to make recourse to the Inspector General of Police before carrying out State Governor’s lawful orders.
- iii. Recruitment of more people into the Police institution by each State renamed and restyled after this model, for example: Enugu State Civil Police (ESCP) or Cross River State Civil Police (CRSCP). ‘Force’ as applied to Nigeria Police should be omitted under the proposed new policing dispensation.

This idea is to obliterate from the mindset of the officers under the new dispensation of the psychological effrontery of being “force officers” and tending towards being aggressive and bullish, to the civil populace, with or without arms as police officers. This would condition their mindset and thinking as friend of the people.

The State government having recruited enough personnel into its civil police should give security top priority as the prerequisite for peace and orderly development. The essence of recruitment commensurate to policing needs of each State is to avoid the pitfall of inadequate manpower that has plagued the Nigeria Police Force which significantly contributed to police inability to tackle and contain the wave of criminality at the moment.
- iv. Each State should build its police around local citizens using the current neighbourhood watch groups or vigilance team members as the foundation. This will enhance pro-active and rapid response policing culture in a familiar environment.

The background profile of the bulk of the police personnel would significantly contribute to effective policing duties as such impediments as unfamiliarity, language barriers, suspicion, antagonism by local residents to the police officers, among others are out of the way. This is a major facilitative factor towards successful policing.

In addition, knowledge of the local terrain, prevalent crimes, coded signs and languages in perpetrating crimes, major crime spots, styles and tactics as well as discovering emerging crimes will all work to the advantage of the officers towards effective, responsible and responsive policing.

- v. Decent and proper kitting of the police personnel to avoid the present situation that characterize the Nigeria Police Force where police officers look haggard, beggarly and undignified when dressed for duties should be avoided. Decent and dignified appearance of police officers would motivate them and make them have self-worth and dignity towards discharging their duties.
- vi. Rigorous training and re-training of the newly created police should be embarked upon in order to inculcate adequate policing knowledge, ethics and tactics in the members. This has to include police-civilian relationship, detection of crimes, rules guiding use of force, and the need to respect rights of the citizenry among others.
If these ethical values are fully imbibed by members of the Police, proper foundation would have been laid for effective police-public relationship for the general good.
- vii. Another important undertaking by the relevant State Government is sufficient equipment of the police. This should be conscientiously and dutifully implemented on time. Where there is adequate manpower in the police but insufficient arms and other vital equipment like police helicopters, Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's), patrolling vans, cars and communication gadgets, such police may not achieve their maximum potential.
In essence, the situation as it currently exists must be reversed under State Police model to achieve meaningful result.
- viii. Promotion culture as and when due should be embraced by the appropriate authority in the relevant State. Promotion of any class of workers is one tonic that brings out the best in such workers as management experts tell us.
Police personnel are not exception to this inducement in bringing out their best. It should be pursued and implemented as such.
- ix. Further impetus to effective policing is implementing adequate and meaningful salary structure being paid to police officers, and timely too. This will enhance police image and status, and play a significant role in curbing the bribe taking that have bedeviled the Nigeria Police Force.
Enhanced salary scale for the police officers would act as a further fillip to excellent performance, as they are made to understand the ethical issues surrounding bribery and corruption. There should be zero tolerance in bribe taking under the prospective new police order under the various State Governments.
- x. Adequate funding must be pursued for the new police dispensation. There is no controversy that under the current Nigeria Police Force, funding is disastrous as it has quite significantly affected police efficiency. This must be avoided under the emerging dispensation of State Police if the institution is to achieve maximum result.
- xi. Finally, good road network is recommended for police success in discharging statutory duties. Three important factors for police efficiency are information to the police, arming the police well enough to combat crime, and mobility in reaching crime scenes or patrolling the environment.

In other words, motor able road networks are very important in policing functions. Police may get early information about crime being committed in some place, and being fully armed, may be impeded where the road network is inaccessible or un motor able. Such bad road presence has been the cause of many criminals completing crimes and escaping before police arrival. People often blame the police for arriving late at crime scenes without taking this important factor of State of the road into consideration. Every State government should therefore vigorously and massively pursue good road network infrastructure preparatory to efficient mobility when the State Police System takes off; and indeed, for the present police system.

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