Crime Control in Nigeria: The Odds against the Police

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ABSTRACT

Safety to lives and property is sine qua non for sustainable development in any socio-political system, but in contemporary Nigeria, the belligerent Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram insurgents of the North West and a host of all other militants have rendered the entire country humdrum, pernicious and insecure. Crimes are committed with impunity as people, banks, other business and commercial houses are violently robbed and looted, public and private buildings are bombed or burnt without the apprehension of the perpetrators. The Nigeria police that are straddled with so many frailties which have hampered their effectiveness and efficiency are still expected to maintain peace and order in Nigeria. Using observation and exploratory methodology, this paper examines some atypical features against the police efficiency and concludes that the police must be ethically reoriented, trained, motivated and provided with necessary logistics and equipment for optimum performance.

Keywords: Crime control, criminals, insurgents, terrorism, militants, security

INTRODUCTION

With the incessant violent armed robberies, kidnappings, drug, children and women trafficking, bombing of public buildings and the loss of lives and properties experienced in recent time in Nigeria, it can be said off-hand that the country has a crime problem. Added to this loathsome problem is the jaded performance of the law enforcement agents which has its roots in the wrong foundation upon which the whole institution was built. The colonial overlords established a predatory police administration in Nigeria with the view to guarding their various strategic installations and to suppress any opposition against the colonial rule by the ‘natives’. This phenomenon has since pitched the police against the public in Nigeria.

The involvement of the police in corruption, economic and financial scam has produced an unhealthy and unfriendly environment for them to operate. The seeds of discord, bitterness and hatred planted in the police institution by the colonial masters have now germinated to portray the organization as the enemy of the public that should be avoided at any given opportunity. They are so hated by the public that no one wants to volunteer information because of the fear of being molested and roped in which has become a regular practise.

The Nigeria police have a battered image through her consistent brutality and exploitation of those they are supposed to protect. There are cases upon cases of mischievous and misdirected injustice that the public cannot help but cry out whenever the black uniform of the Nigeria police is cited. The mere mention of the police sends shivers down the spine of even the obedient Nigerians. The police menacingly propped out their guns to forcefully take money from drivers both commercial and private
under the pretence of asking for vehicle particulars that they are not really particular about. Refusal to yield to their demand has led to harassment, manhandling and brutalization of many while others innocent citizens had been maliciously detained, wounded and shot, after which phantom stories are built up to cover their nefarious actions.

According to Akanimo [2012] ‘the police is your friend’, is a jaded cliché. In reality, he stressed, the reverse seems to be the case. The irony of this statement is evident in the hostile and aggressive manner with which the Nigerian policemen bark out orders to fellow compatriots on the roads and in their stations while discharging their duties. Nigerians are familiar with the uncouth exclamations such as hold it! Park well! Put on your inner light! Where are your particulars? What is in your boot? These commands are rendered in bellicose tones to the motorist who is expected to respond in a jiffy in order not to draw the ire of the policeman.

An average policeman in Nigeria is unfriendly, perennially angry, haggard, ill-trained, ill-equipped, and constantly at war with the members of the public. He is also poorly clad in heat-absorbing black uniform, fagged out, grossly underpaid and housed in the most squalid, ill-maintained and decrepit habitation known as barracks that alienate them from the public. During the last nationwide protests against fuel subsidy removal, a detachment of improperly dressed policemen in Wuse area of Abuja made attempts to dissuade protesters from marching into a cordoned area. The only paraphernalia that made them pass for policemen were their rifles and bullet-proof vests. Similar scenarios are commonplace across the country and are emblematic of the complete breakdown of ethical values and discipline in the police force.

ANTECEDENTS OF NIGERIA POLICE FORCE

In April 1861, the British Consul in Lagos obtained permission from his principal in London to establish a Consular Guard comprising of 30 men. Two years later in 1863, this small body of men became known as the "Hausa Guard". It was further regularized in 1879 by an Ordinance creating a Constabulary for the Colony of Lagos. An Inspector-General of Police commanded this Force recruited mainly from Hausa ethnic group and known as the "Hausa Constabulary".

On 1st January 1896, the Lagos Police Force was created and armed like the "Hausa Constabulary". While the developments were taking place in Lagos and part of the Yoruba heartland, the areas now known as Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Cross River States were declared the Oil Rivers protectorate in 1891 with Headquarters at Calabar where an armed constabulary was formed. In 1893 the area was proclaimed the Niger Coast. Constabulary, modelled on the Hausa Constabulary, was formed. It existed for six years and featured prominently in the British expedition to Benin in 1896.

In the Northern parts of the Country the Royal Niger Company, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1886 by the British Government, set up the Royal Niger Constabulary in 1888 with Headquarters at Lokoja to protect its installations along the banks of the River Niger. When the British Government in 1900 following the transfer of administration from the Royal Niger Company proclaimed protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria, the Royal Niger Constabulary was split into the Northern Nigeria Police Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment. In the South, the Lagos Police Force and part of the Niger Coast Constabulary became the southern Nigeria Police Force in 1906 while the bulk of the Niger Coast Constabulary formed the southern Nigeria Regiments. After the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 both Police Forces continued to operate separately until 1st April 1930 when they were merged to form the present Nigeria Police Force with Headquarters in Lagos. [see: http://www.nigeriapolice.org]

In a way, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) can be described as the powerhouse of our internal security. Among other functions, the NPF is charged with maintaining law and order, safeguarding lives and
property and detecting, preventing and controlling crime. Being a critical institution for protecting the peace, tranquillity and security of the Nigerian state in order to create the enabling environment for political stability, social cohesion and economic development, the overwhelming need for a viable police force in the country cannot be toyed with, especially considering the prevailing orgy of violence, killings and destruction across the land, as the aftermath of terrorism, armed robbery, assassination, kidnapping and cultism.

At a dangerous time like this in Nigeria, it is disheartening that our police force is beset with several factors that have emasculated its ability. One of them is under-funding, which has adversely affected this all-important law enforcement agency through lack of requisite manpower (personnel) and infrastructure and tools for crime prevention and control like forensic and fingerprint facilities, patrol vans, arms and ammunition, anti-riot kit, bullet proof jackets and communication gadgets (including phones and walkie-talkie). This is not to mention poor salaries and allowances, which have dampened the morale of the police personnel and made some of them to be easily vulnerable to temptations of bribery and corruption and connivance with criminals. Related to this is lack of adequate welfare and motivational packages in the Nigerian police, in terms of duty allowance, decent offices and barracks, meritorious awards for exemplary staff, promotion of officers and men as and when due and compensation for those who die or sustain injury while on active service. There is also the problem of inadequate training, re-training and re-orientation of some of the police men and women in modern law enforcement/anti-crime techniques, especially now when criminals are becoming more organised, sophisticated and brutal in their nefarious activities.

The near atrophy or neglect of the intelligence arm of the NPF (i.e Force Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Bureau, FCIIB) over the years is another factor militating against the force in its strive to nip crime in the bud. The contagion of bribery and corruption is also blameworthy for undermining the credibility and service delivery capability of the police force. Added to this is frequent abuse of human rights by few bad eggs in the police, as observed through harassment, unlawful arrest or detention, torture and extra-judicial killings – awful acts that have attracted opprobrium and negative image to the force. Also critically affecting the Nigerian police is lack of full cooperation between the force and other security agencies on crime control, which is attributed to rivalry and role conflict. Similar situation can be glimpsed from the lacklustre police-public relation – a disturbing development arising from mutual suspicion and distrust between the two groups. In trying to have a virile and vibrant NPF, the Nigerian government created parallel bodies that duplicate the extant functions and powers of the force, especially the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). This has not solved the problem but has merely aggravated the existing ones.

PROBLEMS OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE

The Nigeria police is faced with myriads of problems that have hampered its effectiveness and efficiency right from its colonial foundation. The organization was ipso facto not established to serve the public; instead it was used as an instrument of subjugation and oppression to beat the erring natives to line when the latter go beyond their bounds. This position was maintained till independence. Thus a police that was based on wrong concept, motives and philosophy was bequeathed to new independent Nigeria. 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 this negative role definition. Civilians are treated with disdain by the police, civil protest is regarded by them as subversive and criminal, the fundamental freedoms and civil liberties of the people are callously trampled upon in the service of an 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 personnel has done little to change their perception of their role as instruments of state terror. Any wonder why the police institution is not
efficient in its primary task of crime prevention and detection, and protection of the populace [Fawole, 2008].

In Nigeria, it is somehow not possible for a full week to pass by without some atrocious conduct of Nigeria Police Force personnel being reported on the pages of the dailies. For instance on October 27, 2011 a daily newspaper reported the fatal shooting of a truck driver by a policeman at a checkpoint near Ibadan in an attempt to extort N20 from the hapless fellow. If it is not extra-judicial killing of suspects in police custody, it is shooting of innocent drivers who refuse to pay toll fees at illegally mounted police checkpoints on the highways, or other forms of inhuman treatment and violation of the person and dignity of innocent and defenceless fellow Nigerians.

Some of the identified endemic problems experienced by the NPF are: recruitment, training, inefficiency, and indiscipline and lack of expertise in specialized fields. Corruption and dishonesty were widespread, engendering a low level of public confidence, failure to report crimes, and tendencies to resort to self-help. Police were more adept at paramilitary operations and the exercise of force than at community service functions or crime prevention, detection, and investigation. In late 70s during the Obasanjo led military regime, an attempt was made to expand the NPF by reducing the recruitment age from nineteen to seventeen and by enrolling demobilized soldiers, but it did not work. Reports of police collusion with criminals were common, as were official appeals to police officers to change their attitude toward the public, to be fair and honest, and to avoid corrupt practices. In an effort to reduce bribery and to make identification of offenders easier, police officers on beats and at checkpoints were not allowed to carry more than N5 on their person [http://www.photius.com/].

Despite all of the various control efforts of the different levels of government, the long neglect of the police during the long years of military rule has resulted into crass inadequacy of the required resources to control crime, in other words this scenario has brought about high rate of crime in Nigeria. The notoriety of criminals has not abated as bandits kidnap daily with demand for heavy ransom from families and friends of the kidnapped while the federal government who controls the law and security maintenance agencies appears helpless.

In agreement with Salam [2008] National police only protect the government in power as well as the rich and criminal politicians. Imagine the number of police officers who are supposed to protect the public but attached to the ministers, governors, permanent secretaries, commissioners and local government chairmen. The central authority can perpetuate itself in power through election rigging with the connivance of the police. National police are often used to silence the opposition and social critics; for instance, it is still very embarrassing that the Nigeria police cannot find the killer of the country’s former Minister of Justice (late chief Bola Ige). Due to bureaucracy, centrally controlled national police can be institutionally corrupt and indiscipline, for example, the Nigeria police open demand for bribe from the people they are supposed to protect. In year 2006, a truck of Nigeria mobile policemen was reported to have descended on governor Oyinlola's convoy, assaulted his security men and vandalised his cars.

**EMPOWERING THE NIGERIA POLICE**

As part of the efforts to empower the Nigerian police, the government need to review with utmost concern the renewed clamour in certain quarters for creation of state police. It is time for the amendment of section 214(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) which states that: “There shall be a police 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”. It is no longer tenable for anyone to say that Nigeria at fifty two [52 years after independence] is not ripe enough for state police with the lame excuse that they will be set against political opponents and used as a sectional force just as it was in the first republic. Nigeria cannot is
not going to be divided with the establishment of decentralized police formations neither has the country been better united with the present unitary system of policing. Where is true federalism? For how long will Nigeria operate the unitary system under federalism?

For a virile police force, the government needs sustained and deliberate effort to inculcate sterling qualities of honesty, integrity, accountability, discipline, selfless service, civility and reliability in the personnel of the force. The creation of an enviable police force ideally involves ensuring that the process of recruitment into the police is transparent, honest and meticulous so as to separate applicants who are not qualified or who have doubtful disposition. Such a force must be people-friendly in order to attract public support and build good image in the mind of the population.

The tempo of building a police force with admirable qualities in Nigeria have increased with a number of promising advances and striking actions of the Acting Inspector General of Police, Mr Mohammed Dahiru Abubakar. His recent pronouncement stopped the mounting of police roadblocks/checkpoints across the country [in most cases seen by some members of the public as hub of extortion] has earned him a outpouring public accolades. To the already overwhelming problems of bribery and corruption and flagrant violation of fundamental human rights by some elements in the force, he warned the perpetrators to desist from such unwholesome acts or be shown the way out.

The Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID), as the FCIIB is formerly known in the 1980s and 90s, was renowned for the prowess and effectiveness of its undercover operatives in busting serious crime through surveillance and gathering of intelligence information. With a will, the present police system in the country could re-enact such crime prevention feat and this should be augmented with research and development (R&D) on viable crime control measures. Effective inter-agency cooperation could also help the Nigerian police to be up and doing in discharging its statutory responsibilities, especially at these times we are facing the ravages of crime and violence, which demand a cordial working relationship between the force and other relevant security and intelligence organisations through collaboration and exchange of information.

CONCLUSION

The police is an indispensable institution of social control and maintenance of peace and stability; but given the antecedents of the Nigeria police, it has been confronted with myriads of problems. These are in the areas of accountability, effectiveness in detection, prevention, apprehension and prosecution of offenders. The police never got the training, the tools and the support it needed to function effectively. With their unkempt posture, worn out boots, and torn uniforms, should astounding performance be expected?

What should be expected from a police that is vastly under remunerated, understaffed, poorly trained, ill-equipped and poorly motivated? Yet, they are consistently expected to bravely apprehend armed robbers, kidnappers, terrorists and white collar criminals and not to ask for or take bribes to supplement their miserable income. The socio-economically unprotected police are looked upon to keep the society safe. The Nigeria police force is nothing but a mere reflection of the state; this explains why measures employed in fighting crime often fail.

RECOMMENDATION

The restructuring of the police to instil tenets of good policing and positive values for effective service delivery will go a long way to assuage some of the teething problems enumerated above. On this basis, the government should re-orientate those in service to learn and live up to high moral standards, blameless, vigilant, responsive, and sober and of good behaviour. A friendly, courteous policing is usually more efficient than the brash and violent type.
The federal government should ensure that men and women who see the job as a calling with clean antecedents, straight records and a sense of purpose to rid the nation of crime are recruited. The remunerations must be commensurate with the labour, sacrifice, risk, year of training, hours of duty, experience and skill. A well paid cop will be emotionally satisfied, psychologically stable ready to give his best and be morally averse to deviant acts. The Report of the Stephen Oronsaye Committee on the Rationalisation and Restructuring of Federal Government Agencies and Parastatals should be examined and re-considered on how to merge NSCDC with the NPF. Alternatively, the Civil Defence Corps could be left as it is, without being issued with assault rifles.

The salaries and allowances must be reviewed regularly to take care of inflation, and to make the take-home pay meet up with the standard of living like the other professions. An officer gives his best when he is promoted as at when due, whether by promotional examination, years of service, promotional courses, and innovation at work or as appreciation of risk taken. Proper insurance policy should be instituted for the police to take care of the officer and men in and out of service.

Training in all forms of social sciences, humanities and law is essential to improve police - community relationship. Professional courses are also necessary so as to provide the Police with expertise required in investigations of crimes involving the professions; whether as individuals or as groups. Training and exchange practices abroad are to be encouraged to lift the standards to that of the developed world. High standard of education should be added to physical fitness, dexterity in investigation, control and undermining of crimes as part of the set goals in police training.

The police must be well provided for in terms of adequate logistics (equipment, vehicles, communication gadgets, ammunitions, money for running the offices, petrol for vehicles etc). They will be inefficient if they are insufficiently provided for. No one goes to war on his own account. The situation as it is now whereby the uniforms, kits, boots, belts, caps, etc, are paid for by the officers themselves, are bad for a nation that desires an unblemished performance from its Police officers. The government should spend more to adequately equip the police.

In Nigeria, we all talk about the problem of corruption in all segments of the society. It is also in the police. It should be weeded out as soon as it is detected, and with regular purging. But care must be taken, lest it turn to witch-hunting. A miscreant could be disciplined, retrained, refrained, re-orientated and infused with a change of heart. The habit of learning from errors of the past and correcting the past mistakes is the part of the process of development that should be encouraged in the police organization. Above all the country needs decentralisation of Nigeria law enforcement and crime control system particularly the police force; this will encourage effectiveness, efficiency, specialisation and professionalism. Nigeria will not have decent, effective, efficient and professional police force if we keep on believing in the ‘myth’ that state governors will use the police under their command to intimidate, harass or hunt political opponents. Nigeria needs to move away from the medieval way of policing into a modern policing system.

In consonance with Soyombo [2009] submission, there is need for the recruitment of more police officers in order to enhance the crime control efforts. With about 312,000 police personnel to about 140 million people this gives a ratio of 1:448. This is lower than the United Nations Standard of 1:400. With the general inadequacy of resources, a much lower police -citizen’s ratio is required for Nigeria to effectively be in a position to police the crime problem. Furthermore there is need for more support to the police in terms of providing them with modern day equipment and facilities, as well as training of police officers. To complement this is the need to improve the working (and remuneration) and living conditions of the police and other law-enforcement agents. The Police Service Commission and the Ministry of Police Affairs must come up with a pragmatic blueprint that would restore the police to its pride of place in the nation’s security sphere. Constant training and retraining, proper housing,
occupational hazards insurance scheme, robust salary structure and an effective pension scheme must be given priorities so as to boost the ebbing morale of the rank and file.

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