

**APPRAISING THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE FIGHT
AGAINST TERRORISM AND INSURGENCIES IN NIGERIA,
1960-2020**

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ABSTRACT

The composition, establishment and operational control of the Nigeria Police Force are clearly stated in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which has the protection of lives and property at its core. Nigeria is presently embroiled in a war against terrorism and is struggling to put down an insurgency in the north eastern part of the country. While most studies examine the role of the Armed Forces in trying to curtail the insurgency and terrorist acts alike, little studies emphasise the role of the Nigeria Police Force in this war. Part of these roles can be understood by bringing to light the existence of some of Nigeria's police special units such Explosives Ordnance Disposal (EOD), K9, Forensics, and intelligence. This study also goes further by making an attempt to examine the counter-insurgency strategies of the Nigeria Police Force and their effectiveness or otherwise in tackling the menace of terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria. This study largely depends on secondary sources. This involves the location and examination of relevant publications or other sources of information to the research topic.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria today is confronted with the menace of terrorism and its security agencies are battling an insurgency particularly in the northeast of the country. Terrorism in Nigeria is evolving but unfortunately security arrangements are still largely conventional



and predictable and therefore offer a limited challenge to the flexibility, speed and deception that characterise guerrilla style attacks by extremist groups. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is one of the security agencies at the forefront of the war against terrorism and insurgency in the country. Since independence, Policing in Nigeria has been governed by various factors such as the political behavioural pattern of the population, the nature of the socio-economic environment where both the government and the governed operate, and the ability of the former to meet the challenges raised by the latter.¹ Since 1960, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) for example had to carry out their law enforcement within certain political and socio-economic environments, or conditions but unfortunately performed in almost all cases below expectations.

In other words, though the NPF force was established to combat crime and ensure security of lives and property of the citizenry, experience over the years had shown that the force has lived below minimum standards. Some of the reasons explaining this failure are known to include corruption, delayed justice, impartiality among others, which have all consequently made people to see the police as an enemy rather than a friend.² The purpose of this study is to highlight some of the strategies employed by the Nigeria Police in combating Terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria within the context of policing in Nigeria.

Terrorism and Insurgency in Nigeria

Definitions of terrorism are usually complex and controversial, and because of the inherent ferocity and violence of terrorism, the term in its popular usage developed an intense stigma. Notwithstanding, Terrorism is largely viewed to mean the threat or use of physical coercion, primarily against non-combatants especially civilians, to create fear in order to achieve various political objectives.³ Generally, two fundamental challenges have confronted most Third World Countries such as Nigeria since independence: lack of national integration rooted in societal divisions along racial, ethnic, linguistic or religious lines, and economic underdevelopment (largely due to corruption and



mismanagement). Therefore, it was not surprising to find inter group antagonism and distrust eventually giving rise to insurrections directed at governments, as well as psychological and cultural resistance to change among groups. Further worsening this situation is the frustrations aimed at political leaders who failed to make good on promises that they would improve their people's standard of living. Such failures normally had one or more causes. In many cases leaders were incompetent, saw their own power base as threatened by needed changes, or simply were overwhelmed by the magnitude of their problems and their lack of resources.

Throughout the world, terrorism reinvents itself in new and more dangerous forms. As older groups are defeated or exhausted, more radical and more violent successors often take their place. According to military historians, the scenario of insurgencies over the years have usually followed this pattern: first the building up of cells; subversive operations such as strikes, demonstrations and riots; insurgency, with attacks by bombs and guns on persons and property; as more sympathizers are gained, groups take control of parts of the country; finally outright civil war followed by the collapse of the government, or the governments fall without civil war.⁴

In Nigeria the divisive force of religious differences in particular have been intensified by ambitious and unscrupulous Nigerian politicians who have appealed to the religious sentiments of their people in order to win their votes at elections, or to score points against an opponent. These politicians have gone further by using these people to ignite acts of social, ethnic and religious violence. Karl Marx spoke of religion as means devised by the privileged to subjugate the less privileged under perpetual hegemony in order to exploit them spiritually, physically, psychologically and sexually.⁵ Boko Haram and splinter groups such as JAMBS (presently known as ISWAP)⁶ are believed by analyst to be largely a product of widespread socioeconomic and religious insecurities, and that its ideology resonates among



certain communities because of both historical narratives and modern grievances.⁷

Anti Terrorism Law

Until 2011, Nigeria's legal regime contained not one law specifically designed to deal with terrorism. The legal framework for the prevention of terrorism in Nigeria is essentially embodied in two enactments: Terrorism Prevention Act (TPA) 2011 and Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013. "The two laws shall hereinafter collectively be referenced to as Terrorism (Prevention) Act 2011 (as amended) or TPA 2011 (as amended), as the context so admits".⁸ The bill gives the police and security forces powers to seal off a property or vehicle without a search warrant and allows judges to order the detention of suspects for up to 30 days if they feel it is in the interests of public safety.⁹ The Act basically addresses the issues of prevention, prohibition, and combating terrorism, as well as the financing of terrorism. It also provides for the effective implementation of the 'Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism as well as the Convention on the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism,' and prescribes penalties for the violation of its provisions. These penalties can range from a 20-year jail term to death sentences depending on the severity of cases. The Act also facilitates help from foreign governments by way of mutual assistance, information sharing, and extradition with regard to terrorism-related offences.¹⁰

The Nigeria Police Force in Retrospect

The primary purpose of the Nigeria Police (Colonial Police) since colonial rule was to protect British economic and political interests. The police accomplished this objective through the often brutal subjugation of indigenous communities that resisted colonial occupation; consequently, the use of force by the Police has characterized law enforcement in Nigeria ever since.¹¹ by 1960 Nigeria gained independence. Subsequently, the Military Government (Military rule did a lot of damage to the police, and its legacy is still here) that emerged after the two military coups) in



1966 disbanded the local police forces amidst allegations that the local police had been used for partisan purposes by the regional governments against political opponents especially during the First Republic (1960-1966).¹² By 1972, the local police forces were fully integrated into the Nigeria Police Force (NPF).¹³ Since then, the NPF, a national force under the control of the Federal Government, has been the sole entity responsible for policing Nigeria.

The composition, establishment and operational control of the Police Force are clearly stated in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria {Section 214(1)} that “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”.¹⁴ These provisions which are reinforced in the Police Act and Regulations of 1990 Chapter 359 which classified the duties of the Police to include: prevention and detection of crime, apprehension of offenders, preservation of law and order, protection of life and property, enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and the performance of such military duties within or without Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of the Act or any other Act.¹⁵

Unfortunately, internal government and civil society reports since then have consistently identified problems of misconduct (e.g. bribery and corruption) within the NPF. It has been observed over the years that the public poor perception of the police was in part attributable to it being ill trained, ill-motivated and ill-equipped. This is not surprising seeing that unsuitable candidates had often bribed their way into the force and that lucrative postings (such as border stations where smuggling is rampant) are bought and that bribes are offered to affect assignment to duties with opportunities for extra income (i.e. traffic, vehicle inspection and criminal investigation duties etc). for example, by the early 1990s, the Nigerian police had established a reputation for being consistently repressive, corrupt,



and ineffective, for taking kickbacks, and also for accepting bribes from criminal suspects to avoid prosecution and other forms of case fixing.¹⁶

Corruption continued to flourish. Over time, morale declined and the police deteriorating public image deterred quality candidates from entering the force. Consequently, it ended up with most of the people who were joining the Nigerian police, simply doing so as either a way of getting out of unemployment/underemployment and poverty, or due to the ease of being recruited with inadequate or non existing qualifications/criteria; why others saw it just as a very easy (though often illegal) way of making money etc

State Response or Lack of Professionalism

The response of the NPF to terrorism and crime/threats in general has been that of two sides of the same coin; that is, in either case the response has been unprofessional. For example in some instances a lackadaisical attitude towards confronting threats is displayed, while in some other instances when the Police choose to act, they have been found using excessive force which is unprofessional and against the precepts of human rights. Excessive force refers to a force that is above that which is reasonable and a prudent law enforcement officer would use under normal circumstances. Closely tied to this is that of extra judicial killings, degrading treatment of citizens like rape, arbitrary arrest, and torture by police officers.¹⁷ These officers reportedly extort citizens after intimidating them and women and girls are sometimes allegedly raped on a number of occasions whether or not during conflict.¹⁸

Many Nigerians had their misgivings about the police handling of the 2009 Boko Haram case. Many wondered why it took the security and intelligence agencies so long to discover the activities of the Boko Haram sect. Again, questions were raised about the brutal killing of Muhammad Yusuf – the alleged Boko Haram leader who was killed in Police custody after being arrested by the army.¹⁹



Problem of Funding, Personnel and Equipment

The authorities of the Nigeria Police Force have always provided the technical details of material inadequacies, even if sometimes exaggerated for obvious reasons. For example, between 1994 and 2003, the amount of funds actually released to the police relative to its request for capital vote ranged from 0% for 2003 to 9.5% in 1998; and for overhead costs, amount released ranged from 4% in 2003 to 5% in 1998 and 2002.²⁰ Yet, the Force is supposed today to cover a population of over 150 million Nigerians, spread over more than 926,000 square kilometres of land. The then Present IG of Police (Adamu Adamu) mentioned that since he assumed office in 2019 he observed that the police received less than 20% of the N25 billion capital budget for security outfits. This according to him is despite the fact that the Police proposed a capital budget of N342.9 billion for the 2018 fiscal year.²¹

There are approximately 371,000 police officers in Nigeria which amounts to a ratio of one police officer to 377 persons. Interestingly, the United Nations recommended general benchmark is one police officer per 400 citizens.²² This shows clearly that the problem of the police in Nigeria is not with the number but with the “level of training, kitting, competence and technical proficiency, which currently, the Nigeria Police does not possess.”²³

The police in Nigeria are poorly equipped and do not have modern technological support to perform effectively. They lack adequate vehicles, communication equipment, arms, boats, Helicopters, scientific crime prevention facilities, e.g. CCTV Cameras, fingerprint equipment, Forensic laboratory. Computers are hardly found in police stations and important offices of the police administration and, in most cases, police officials are computer illiterate’. All Police officers on duty should be equipped with at least walkie talkies (hand held radios) and Provision of APCs’ (Armored Personnel carrier) and modern weapons to combat high scale crimes such as armed robbery and terrorism/insurgency.²⁴



NPF Special Units : Forensic, K9, EOD, and Intelligence

Nigeria can only boast of two Forensic labs. The lab in Lagos is a state owned facility. The other one was established in Abuja by the police. These two forensic laboratories serve a country of approximately 150 million people. This means that officers still largely depend on rudimentary methods to investigate crime. The 2008 Presidential Committee on Police Reform found that the police are generally unable to use scientific methods of observation, investigation and analysis to detect and interpret physical evidence relating to crime found at crime scenes. Thus, the police often rely on torture to forcefully extract confessions from suspects.²⁵ More personnel need to be trained in forensic analysis including expertise finger print and handwriting analysis. In addition, according to a previous report in 2004 (by DIG Musa Abdulkadir) the NPF had 89 dogs as against 1000 for reasonable coverage of the country.²⁶

The Explosives Ordinance Disposal (EOD) Command of the Nigeria Police Force has decried easy access to improvised explosives devices by terrorists and armed robbers.²⁷ However, the anti-bomb unit of the police which was originally formed after the civil war in the country to identify and perhaps, detonate unexploded objects of the war, has continued to struggle (in terms of adequate training, manpower and sophisticated equipment) to face the present security challenges in the country especially, in the northern states of the federation.

Intelligence

It is apparent that the police in Nigeria suffer from both a lack of material and professional human inputs in intelligence gathering. Thus, even if the police have the necessary communication and related gadgets, a lack of human resources will not just undermine the effective and proper use of such equipment, but also the ability to properly collect and evaluate the information/data generated or gathered. However, even if the human resource is adequate, outdated and unserviceable communication gadgets, the absence



of an institutional framework and standardized method of data collection for crime information management will seriously affect the ability of the police to produce reliable official statistics on crime. Thus all necessary components must be present.

NPF Counter-Terrorism/Insurgency Strategies:

The Way Forward

In community policing, the community should be the primary objective for the police; its tacit support, its submission to law and order, its consensus etc. It is therefore necessary to obtain the support of the community not only in the form of sympathy and approval but in active participation in keeping the society safe. The Police must build confidence in the community by conducting themselves professionally and showing the ability to hold volunteered information in the highest secrecy and protect those they have been entrusted to protect at all cost.

In community policing, law enforcement agencies share power with residents of a community, and critical decisions need to be made at the neighborhood level. Establishing and maintaining mutual trust between citizens of a community and the police is the main goal of the first component of community policing. In full partnership, law enforcement agencies and a community's residents and business owners are supposed to identify core problems, propose solutions, and implement a solution. For this problem-solving process to operate effectively, the police need to devote time and attention to discovering community's concerns, and they need to recognize the validity of those concerns.²⁸

If the police treat suspected terrorist/insurgents using methods and practices outside the law, such as collective punishment or arbitrary detention, this itself undermines the legitimacy of government and can create new grievances, inhibiting the effectiveness of counter-terror or counter-insurgency policies. The National Counter-terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), and the Nigeria's De-Radicalization Programme Guide are key documents that guide Nigeria's efforts to counter-terrorism. The contents of the documents are holistic and robust. For instance, NACTEST proposes a whole government approach for counter-terrorism. However, in the real



sense and in reality, the counter-terrorism in Nigeria is dominated by security operations. The country need investments in evidence-based research to interpret terrorist's narrative and messages.²⁹ importantly the following are necessary:

1. National Data Base (and constantly updated).
2. Strict enforcement and implementation of Anti-terrorism Laws
3. Good Governance
4. Harmonization of security reforms
5. Policy Reforms
6. Sophisticated Equipment, Discipline and training (training curricula in police training institutions must reflect present day challenges e.g. detailed courses on terrorism/military History, policing, forensics etc).
7. Motivation and moral/reward system
8. Recruitment: Police officers should be recruited based on established minimum criteria and educational standard.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the role of the Nigeria Police in combating terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria. The study does this by appraising the performance of the police over the years. It is observed that although the police have a constitutional role to play in tackling crimes such as terrorism, there performance in carrying out this role within the general context of security has been largely disappointing. Although various police special units exist to tackle terrorism and insurgency, the issues of poor funding, corruption, lack of adequate equipment and well trained personnel serve as impediments to police professionalism till date and Police counter-insurgency strategies can only be as good as their implementation which is crucial to winning the war against terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria



END NOTES

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