

STATE POLICE: A PREREQUISITE FOR EFFECTIVE SECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines state police as a prerequisite for achieving effective security in Nigeria. It is no longer news that Nigeria is currently facing her worst level of insecurity since the end of her civil war in 1970. The spate of violent crimes in Nigeria today is such that requires urgent solution from the stake holders. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government and its institutionalized agencies have failed to put an end to this menace. Lives and property are being lost on daily basis in an unprecedented magnitude, as a result of the activities of deadly non state actors such as the Boko Haram, Killer Herdsmen, Unknown Gun Men, Armed Bandits, among others. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has failed to effectively address these security challenges, due to so many factors. It is against this background that this paper strongly advocates for the establishment of state police in all the 36 states of the federation and Abuja. The enormity of security challenges confronting the Nigerian state and the inability of the current Nigerian Police Force to effectively address them calls for immediate decentralization of the Nigerian Police Force. The paper argues that the vast territory of Nigeria, coupled with her enormous demography, shows that the Nigerian Police Force as it stands today cannot effectively carry out their constitutional roles which involves protection of lives and property, especially as the police institution is seriously understaffed. The paper argues that state police is in line with the principle of true federalism upon which Nigeria fashioned her Constitution. It therefore condemns the current structure of the Nigerian police



as enshrined in the constitution, because it negates the concept of state police which is a common practice in many developed societies. This study adopts qualitative research method. It relies on both primary and secondary sources.

Key words: Community Policing, Internal Security, Nigeria, Prerequisite, State Police.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is an important security outfit of the federal government of Nigeria, saddled with the responsibilities of taking charge of the internal security of the country, maintaining order and enforcing the laws as contained in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the high level of insecurity facing the country at present is such that is currently stretching the country's security apparatus, particularly the Police Force, to a point of not being able to adequately curtail the menace.¹

Moreover, the deadly activities being carried out by dangerous groups such as the Boko Haram insurgence, Killer Herdsmen, Armed Bandits, Kidnapping Syndicates, Armed Robbers, Unknown gunmen, among others have caused and are still causing a whole lot of security challenges to the Nigerian government and the populace alike. Many lives and property have been lost on daily bases in an unprecedented proportion, while millions of people have been forced to become internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and refugees in their own country and neighbouring countries respectively.²

Therefore, the failure of the Nigerian government to urgently address these ugly security situation in the country has made many people to begin to ask questions about the capacity of the country's security apparatus, especially the Police Force which is saddled with the responsibility of taking care of the nation's internal security. Opinions are divided among the populace over what should be done to achieve effective policing in Nigeria. While



some groups argue that the solution to effective internal security lies with the repositioning of the existing Nigerian Police Force, others believe that the current structure of the Nigerian Police Force which is under the sole control of the federal government is the major reason why the Police have failed in their constitutional roles of effectively maintaining laws and order in Nigeria.³

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE NIGERIAN POLICE

The establishment of a 1200 member armed paramilitary Hausa constabulary in 1879 and the setting up of the Royal Niger Company Constabulary in 1888 were the first time such security outfits were formed. This landmark achievement was closely followed by the establishment of the Niger Coast Constabulary in 1894 under the newly proclaimed Niger Coast Protectorate. The Lagos Police was subsequently established in the year 1896 to maintain law and order.

It is also very pertinent to note that when the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were proclaimed in the first quota of the 20th century, part of the already established Royal Niger Company Constabulary became the Northern Nigeria Police, while the Niger Coast Constabulary metamorphosed into the Southern Nigeria Police. Therefore, the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern regional Police Forces in the year 1930 led to the emergence of the Nigerian Police Force.⁴ Many people have argued that the amalgamation of these two forces was purely for administrative convenience, rather than effective policing.

It must also be noted that colonial administrators ensured that the Nigeria Police Force worked closely with the local governments (The Native Authorities). It is imperative to note that the Nigeria Police Force was restructured, regionalized and subsequently nationalized in the years after independence.⁵



State Police as a Precondition for Effective Policing In Nigeria

The present realities in Nigeria as regards high level of insecurity are such that require the establishment of State Police in each of the 36 component states of the federation and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Even though, the structure of Police system in Nigeria as enshrined in the country's Constitution negates the concept of state police, the fact remains that the failure of the Nigerian Police Force under the strict control of the federal government to effectively address the enormous security challenges ravaging the country clearly demonstrates that there is need for the decentralization of the Nigeria Police Force.

The establishment of State Police in Nigeria will be a precondition for effective policing in Nigeria, especially as the federal government which has exclusive power on police related matters is far removed from the component states which happen to be the epicenter of these criminalities. The bureaucratic bottleneck that characterizes Civil and Public services shows that the police under the sole control of the federal government cannot operate effectively in Nigeria.⁶

It is pertinent to note that when power of control is extended to the component states, responses to avert crimes will be immediate and effective. The unnecessary delay that usually occurs while waiting for the presidency to give order to the Inspector General of Police to act is a dangerous practice which has led to the loss of many lives and property that ordinarily should have been protected by allowing states governors to issue such order. Therefore, devolution of power through constitutional amendment is quite essential at this critical period of Nigerian history.⁷

It must be pointed out that even though the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria allows component states power to give any lawful directive to the Commissioner of Police in charge of the state with respect to the maintenance of public safety and order, the fact remains that the onus lies with the State Commissioner of Police to either obey such directive or



report same to the Inspector General of Police, who would in turn take order from the President of the country. This lengthy process does not give the officers room for quick response in emergency situation. Corroborating the above argument are Ojong Ochum and Bem Japhet Audu who noted that:

The Constitution makes no pretence as to who really is the overall boss of the Nigerian Police. The provision of section 215 (4) is unequivocal that a State Commissioner of Police shall be at liberty to refer a directive given by a state governor to the President before acting on them. In Nigeria where most government decisions are influenced by politics, a governor's directive to the State Commissioner of Police is prone to constant veto.⁸

The above quotation clearly demonstrates that apart from bureaucratic bottlenecks, lack of constitutional power to control the police by the State Governors delay quick responses from the Police officers to avert crimes. The current governor of Ekiti State, Kayode Fayemi who is also the Chairman Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF), once argued that it is highly illogical that the State governors who are Chief Security Officers of their respective states do not have control over the Police they are spending heavily to maintain. According to Fayemi, "State Police is long overdue." He enumerated some of the assistance given to the police in different states to include donation of vehicle, uniforms, arms and ammunitions, accommodations among others.⁹

It is also very important to note that component states have their peculiar security challenges which can only be better managed by the indigenous officers who understand the culture, the terrain and the people they are protecting. Police officers are supposed to be friendly with the people and also know where they live and what they do for a living. In addition, they should be able to know trouble spots in the communities where they are protecting. It is only when the officers have adequate knowledge of the above, that they can function more effectively. It must be noted



that at present Nigerians see the police as their enemies because of the unruly behavior of some of the officers. People don't believe in the common mantra which says that "Police is your friend."¹⁰ Corroborating the above assertion are Comfort Oluwaseun Oluwagbemi et al who argued that:

A critical analysis of the organization and operation of the Nigeria Police will leave no one in doubt that it is a carry-over from colonial era or copy and paste of what is obtainable in western nations without embracing the norms and values of what made them to be accountable and win the heart of the citizenry. Hence, the police in Nigeria is oppressive and perceive the citizenry as object of their aggression. This explains why no confidence is reposed in the police and many prefer to pay criminals for them to be secured rather than trust the police.¹¹

State Police if established in Nigeria, will bring Police officers and the people closer than one is witnessing today, and this will also help the police in carrying out their investigations more efficiently. In other words, it will help the officers in the area of information gathering as many people will be more willing to play the role of informant. Cordial relationships between the police and the policed would reduce disagreement between the police and the people. It will reduce police brutality and exploitation through collection of bribery to the barest minimum, because of the familiarity that would exist between them.¹²

It is germane to note that at present, the country's police image is facing serious criticism from the press and the populace. The Nigerian police under the strict control of the federal government have been accused of corruption and involvement in armed robbery cases. It has also been alleged that some of the bad eggs among them expose informants and exploit innocent citizens for their selfish ends. All these have posed and are still posing serious threat to national security and loss of confidence in the



Nigerian police force by the citizens. The fear of being victimized by the police has made many people to neither volunteer information nor assist the police in unraveling crimes. The nefarious activities of some of these bad eggs in the Police system were responsible for the ENDSARS movement which claimed many lives of police officers and property running into billions of naira.¹³

The Nigerian Police Force as it is structured today is faced with several operational challenges which in turn have contributed to their ineffectiveness. Apart from poor training which is seriously affecting their relationship with the people and attitude to work, the Nigerian Police is also confronted with the problem of inadequate equipment, which has placed the criminals in a more advantageous position. Criminals these days bear more sophisticated weapons than the Police and this strongly account for the constant loss of lives of these officers to the activities of these criminal gangs.¹⁴ A critical examination of the rising insecurity in Nigeria, coupled with the failure of the Federal Police Force in effectively addressing these challenges have shown that State Police working hand in hand with the Federal Police will be more effective and result oriented in combating the rising insecurity in the country. It must be noted that any security arrangement that is not people friendly may likely fail to achieve its constitutional roles, especially as collaboration between the security outfits will be extremely difficult.¹⁵

Many people have argued that state police would be an additional burden to state governments. However, they have failed to realize that even under this current dispensation, the state governments through the Governors, fund police in their respective states. In Lagos for instance, the state government established a Police Trust Fund which for a very long time has been helping in funding the police.

It must also be noted that huge security votes that usually come from the federal government will also go a long way in funding state police when established. In fact, it is only when state police is on ground that these monthly security votes would be



effectively and judiciously utilized. It is also pertinent to note that with state police structure, the component units would be able to determine their individual peculiar challenges and needs, and would be able to raise the required manpower and finances to meet these needs.¹⁶

Another factor which validates the need for state police is the enormous territory Nigeria, has. The vast territory of the country makes it extremely difficult for the current federal police system to effectively protect lives and property in the country. Put succinctly, the country is too large not to have a state police. For instance, in the North-Eastern part of the country, many expanse of land remain unprotected. The popular Sambisa forest is a very good example of an area which serves as a hideout for terrorist groups and other criminal elements.

There are several other places in different parts of Nigeria where security agencies have not been able to cover because of the vast nature of the areas. Therefore, considering the above argument, the only solution to these problems is to urgently establish state police that will be under the control of the state governors. The efficacy of local militia groups such as the Oodua Peoples' Congress, Bakasi Boys, among others, attest to the fact that security is a local problem and only those who have adequate knowledge of the terrain can effectively manage it¹⁷.

The establishment of State Police in Nigeria will also strengthen community policing. It is germane to note that every community within its social organization provides a particular institution responsible for the maintenance of law.¹⁸ However, in today's 21st Century, to have effective policing, there is the need for the country to establish at least three tiers of Police Force which should start from the central authorities down to the component states and finally to the Local government level. Synergy among these three tiers will help to produce the desired result in the area of achieving effective and efficient security. In addition, it will promote good understanding and mutual cooperation between the Police and the people. According to Ogbonnaya: *et al*:



Community policing emerged to help build confidence between the police and the civilians, maintain internal security, solicit support and enhance the image of the Nigerian Police Force¹⁹

The author went further to argue that community policing in Nigeria is also informed by the desire to build overall police acceptance, manage information gathering, curb illegal arrest, build a police-community partnership framework that prevent crimes and build trust, handle information that threatens public peace and order among others.

It is also essential to note that the establishment of state police will add new standards to policing, thereby fundamentally elevating equality, justice and mutual respect. Community policing which usually evolves through effective state police is dynamic and also serve as a multi-dimensional forum that unconsciously creates and enhances noticeable good relationship between members of the community and the police. It also encourages group participation in proffering solutions to problems militating against the people and the community at large.²⁰

Negel Fielding once noted that “Adequate community policing would bring police into a relationship with the public in which they would work collaboratively.” Community policing has always been the context in which the tools and techniques of preventing and controlling crimes are carried out more effectively.²¹ Police-community relations focuses in the way the police are structured into the community which determines how the police relate with other groups and how they participate in other jurisdictions.²²

Therefore, those who understand the importance of state police in achieving effective security have argued that the issue of conflict of interest between the federal and state police will absolutely be nonexistent. The reason being that the constitution of the country will spell out each tier’s roles and area of jurisdiction which will completely remove the issue of conflict of interest. In many advanced nations, the practice of having state



police has not caused any conflict of interest. For instance, in the United State of America, the roles being played by the FBI, State and County police are clearly spelt out in their constitution.

It must also be noted that the principal objective of any security outfit or organization should include the security of persons, property and the preservation of public tranquility. The old practice of detecting and punishing offenders after they have succeeded in committing the crime should not be the main focus of the security agencies. The common saying that “prevention is better than cure” holds true with respect to ensuring that crimes do not erupt and even when it does, should not be allowed to escalate.²³

Therefore, to achieve effective policing in Nigeria, there is the need for the decentralization of the police, so that responses by security officers to quell insurrection should be immediate and effective, especially as state police encourages and strengthens community policing. Validating the above assertion is the failure of the Nigerian government to meet the United Nations’ standard ratio of one policeman to four hundred civilian population(1:400), At present, the ratio of Nigeria police to civilian population stands at about (1:2000), which is grossly inadequate in covering the entire country. This inadequacy has left so many parts of the country porous, thereby leading to incessant countless attacks on such communities, with many lives and property being lost and hundreds of thousands of people being displaced internally.²⁴ It has also created refugees across the country. For instance, there are so many Nigerian refugees in Cameroun, Chad and even Niger Republic who are living in extreme poor condition.

State police in Nigeria is very crucial at this time when the country is battling with growing security challenges which is progressively threatening its sovereignty and development. The Nigerian state is highly under-policed and something needs to be done urgently in order to address these inadequacies. According to Obgonnaya N. Udoh, Iheanyi K. Woke and Agodi Kalu on the issue of threatening security challenges:



The domestic security challenges in Nigeria is so alarming that there is ethnic conflict in the North, Kidnapping in virtually all parts of the country, Militancy and oil pipeline vandalism in the Niger-Delta region, Terrorism and religious extremism by Boko Haram in the North-East, Self-determination agitations by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Cattle rustling and herdsmen disturbances in the North and Central regions, ritual killings in the South-West region, among others.²⁵

The above quotation clearly itemized some of the security challenges facing the Nigerian state. Many people have argued that the police and other security agencies in Nigeria have failed to effectively address these challenges confronting the nation. The Federal government of Nigeria has also been accused of being biased in her war against insecurity in Nigeria. For instance, the refusal of the federal government to proscribe the killer herdsmen as a terrorist group and her immediate proscription of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), a secessionist group as a terrorist group has come to be condemned by many. The establishment of state police will go a long way in effectively addressing these security challenges that are currently threatening the sovereignty of the Nigerian state.

It is also very pertinent to note that the assumption that the component states in Nigeria lack the power to maintain a disciplined force is totally wrong. This is because the Neighbourhood Watch groups under the control of the governors have performed creditably well in different states in Nigeria. Therefore, if these Neighbourhood Watch groups can perform so effectively in their respective states with many limitations, then state police would do far more in the area of protecting lives and property.

Furthermore, the argument that state police will go the same way the native police went particularly as an exploitative tool in



the hands of the state governors does not hold water. This is because native police represented absolute powers by local authorities. The politicians of the period used the native police to exploit and intimidate the people for their own selfish interest and all these were possible because there were no effective checks and balances. Therefore, unlike native police which was a symbol of oppression in the hands of politicians of the period, who strived to satisfy their colonial masters, state police will be regulated by the constitution, with a very strong oversight from the State Houses of Assembly. It is also very important to note that functional local government system is very essential at this critical period in Nigeria history,²⁶ especially as this will help to harmonize the synergy between the state and the local government areas in the area of sustainable internal security..

State Police is the best option, if all the security challenges confronting Nigeria is to be effectively addressed. The inability of the present security, apparatus to stem the tide of the incessant security challenges is highly worrisome. It is no longer news that to police properly, there is need to engage the local people in securing their areas. Lack of state police is one of the major reasons that informed the establishment of local Vigilante security outfit which have assumed different nomenclature in different states..

Furthermore, the proponents of state police have argued strongly that the system is the best option for Nigeria at this crucial time. For instance, Yemi Osinbajo, the current Vice President of Nigeria acknowledged the importance of state police in curbing the worsening security situation in Nigeria. Osinbajo went further to argue that:

We must accept that there is a need for greater decentralization of the Police Force. I have been a frequent advocate of state policing and I believe this certainly must be the way we must go. The National Assembly is in a position to consider some of the proposals that have gone to them for the purpose of devolving more powers to the



*state for security purposes and for addressing the security challenges.*²⁷

From the above quotation, the Vice President made it clear that state police is quite essential in effectively addressing the worsening insecurity in Nigeria.

The Nigerian police as presently structured are guilty of most, if not all the allegations leveled against the native police.²⁸ In other words the federal police are not immune from the malaise that afflicted the native police while it existed. For instance, the Federal Police still engage in crimes such as corruption, oppression/brutalization, victimization among others, making it almost impossible for them to discharge their constitutional roles without fear or favour.

CONCLUSION

The need for State Police in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. This is because the current Nigerian police force has failed to effectively address the numerous security challengers threatening the survival of the Nigerian state. It is therefore believed that only a decentralized police structure where the indigenes that are familiar with the people, their culture and the terrain are conscripted to secure their place. In addition, with state police, officers will be trained according to the peculiarities of the areas where they operate. State Police is so germane because it also strengthens community policing which is very essential in crime prevention and control. In other words, the closeness of state police to the people places the officers in a more proactive position for information gathering, investigation of crime, detecting and nipping in the bud any emerging crime before it escalates. The synergy that would be harnessed among federal, state and community police will go a long way in addressing many security challenges facing the Nigerian people and the country at large.



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