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## **THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INTERNAL SECURITY: THE MYTH AND THE REALITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the capability of the Nigeria Police Force to provide internal security and maintain law and order having regard to its antecedents, tradition and record of performance in the colonial and postcolonial periods. It is discovered that the Force, as it is presently constituted and oriented, is incapable of enforcing laws, preventing crime and protecting the rights, lives and property of the citizens of this country. There is, therefore, an urgent need for reform so as to really internalize the Force, adequately provide for, and support, it.

**Keywords:** colonial, corruption, internalized, reform, reorganization, Security

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The quest for security and law and order which is necessary for and orderly and peaceful existence has been a major reoccupation of human society from time immemorial. It is in order to provide this essential condition that society has fashioned a variety of institutions, ranging from the informal and general to the formal and specialized.<sup>1</sup> In modern day societies the responsibility for internal security and law and order are devolved mainly on a number of paramilitary organizations of which the most notable is the police force. In the case of Nigeria, the responsibility lies with the Nigeria Police Force and the State Security Service among a number of others.

However, in spite of the existence of a number of security outfits in the country, there has been a steep increase in the wave of crimes, especially violent felonies which have not been sufficiently curtailed let alone resolved with the result that the performance of the Nigeria Police force, the main instrument for the provision of law and order, has come under intense scrutiny lately. It is in this regard that the concern in this paper is the Nigeria Police Force and its ability to discharge

its duty effectively and efficiently. This is determined on the basis of the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the Force and its state of readiness and conduct.

## **2. THE FOUNDATION OF THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE**

The circumstances which provided the context for the foundation of the Nigeria Police Force were the various attempts made at British commercial and territorial expansion in the regions watered by the rivers Niger and Benue in the nineteenth century. The first part of this country to be seized as a crown colony by the British in 1861 was Lagos. Obviously, it was in order to retain the new colony for the purpose of promoting unfettered British trade that the then Governor, Lt. Glover, created the Lagos consular guard in the same year<sup>ii</sup>. The next step in the emergence of the Nigeria Police Force was taken in 1879 when the four British firms (West Africa Company, James Pinnock, Holland and Jacques Company and Alexander Miller Brothers) trading in the areas of the Sokoto Caliphate bordering the rivers Niger and Benue came together to form the United Africa Company so as to better work the commerce of the regions<sup>iii</sup>. The first action of the new company upon formation was to provide for the security of its servants and property. To this end, it set up a 1,200-member armed paramilitary Hausa constabulary in the same year.

The continued spate of British colonization of the territories that were, subsequently, to become part of Nigeria led to the taking of several measures in pursuit of the interest. One of the measures was the proclamation of the Niger Coast Protectorate over areas in the south east which was followed in 1894 by the establishment of the Niger Coast Constabulary imperial with a view to addressing the problems of security and law and order in the area<sup>iv</sup>. Another was the transformation earlier in 1896 of the Lagos consular guard into the Lagos Police. Yet another was the claim of more territories in the hinterland made by Britain under the aegis of the Royal Niger Company eight years earlier in 1888 leading, for reasons of security and law and order, to the establishment of the Royal Niger Company Constabulary with headquarters at Lokoja in the same year.

These forces were at various times in the course of the nineteenth century deployed against perceived threats to British imperial ambition in the various areas to be welded together into Nigeria. For example, in 1886 the Royal Niger Company Constabulary bombarded Mbula villages in the upper reaches of the Benue and attacked the Tiv.<sup>v</sup> It also attacked and captured the town of Jibu for interfering with the free passage of commodities, particularly ivory to its factories down the river Benue. Similarly, in 1889 the Constabulary was stationed at Lokoja, effectively taking over jurisdiction over the town from its ruler, *Benu* Mustafa, the Nupe prince.

But it was not until almost a decade later that the Constabulary was deployed in a major engagement against the *emirates* of Bida and Ilorin which refused to accept limitation on their freedom of action in their capacity as independent sovereign.<sup>vi</sup> Ilorin was determined to retain the territories it acquired in Yoruba land to its south while Bida would not countenance the infringement of its sovereignty involved in the unilateral stationing of the forces of the Royal Niger Company in its territory at Leaba, Bajibo and Jebba.<sup>vii</sup> The armies of the emirates, estimated at 8,800-10,800 and 31,000 respectively fought gallantly. But they were no match for the fire power of the Company's guns, particularly the Maxim which wrecked great execution among the emirates' forces. Not only did the emirates suffer a resounding defeat but they may have been thereafter rendered more circumspect in their future dealings with the Royal Niger Company if not more pliant to British imperialism.

It was the respective parts of the Niger Coast Constabulary and the Royal Niger Company Constabulary that became the Southern Nigeria Police and the Northern Nigeria Police following the taking of protectorates of the regions in the early 1900s. The culmination of the process of the formation of the Nigeria Police Force with headquarters at Lagos was reached in 1930 when parts of the regional police forces were amalgamated. But earlier in 1916 a native authority police force was set up for each of the local governments into which the northern and south-western parts of the country were divided. It was on the native authority police that was devolved most of the responsibility for the prevention and control of crime. The police forces were used during the colonial period in the suppression of a number of social uprisings which included workers strikes between 1945 and 1947, women riots in 1920-1930 and 1948 and communal riots in Kano and Tiv land in 1953 and 1959-1960 respectively.<sup>viii</sup>

Judging from the foregoing examination of the process of the foundation of the Nigeria Police Force and its role in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, it is obvious that the security outfit was, and is still very much, a foreign creation designed to promote the interests of its principal which were to sustain the colonial state through the maintenance of internal security and law and order from the standpoint of its masters. This role of the Nigeria Police Force has been explained by O. F. Onoge thus:

The burden of colonial policing was the subordination of the national interests of the people to the political and economic interest of the state. Through armed patrol, raids, arrests and detention, the colonial police protected the political economy by policing labour. Through the enforcement of unpopular direct taxation, the raiding of labour camps and the violent suppression of strikes, the police ensured the creation, supply and discipline of the proletarian labour force required by capitalism.---The police, the most visible enforcer of colonial *diktat*

remained immensely unpopular. The police, in the consciousness of the people, became the symbol of the dictatorial establishment rather than the protector of the people's right. As the people had no checks over the arbitrariness of the police, they either avoided "police trouble" or mediated inevitable contacts with bribe offerings.<sup>ix</sup>

But this is not to say that this role of the police was necessarily, inherently or totally opposed to the interest of the colonized individual. On the contrary, the colonized did enjoy some security of life and property and protection of his rights and freedom to the extent that it was not repugnant to imperial interests. That he must do so and at the same time comply with all laws was *a sine qua non* for the maintenance of law and order and for the survival of the colonial system.

The provision of internal security and maintenance of law and order in the interest of the colonial state on the part of the Nigeria Police Force and the Native Authority Police for more than half a century served to create a tradition of policing that has encouraged the perception of a dichotomy between subjects and rulers leading to an overzealousness to always uphold the interests of the latter against those of the former. This was very much in consonance with the theory that holds that the police are organized to defend the status quo of political oppression and injustice in a totalitarian and economically inequitable society which a colonial regime may be said to approximate.<sup>x</sup> And it is this tradition that has been carried over from the colonial period into the independent era in which, going by the same theory, the police were more likely to provide services that would enhance development and democracy such as the elimination of insecurity, crime, police brutality and pursuit of due process.<sup>xi</sup> But then, there has been very little attempt at weaning the Nigeria Police Force from its colonial mentality.

### **3. ATTEMPTS AT REORGANIZING THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE**

Although there has been very little attempt at reforming the Nigeria Police Force, the institution has undergone some reorganizations which, because they were triggered off by considerations other than internalizing the outfit, has not affected its orientation. But, perhaps, the only exception was the regionalization of the native authority police from 1955, particularly in the Western Nigeria and its eventual dissolution and partial absorption in the Nigeria Police Force by the military administration under General Yakubu Gowon which went along way to eliminate the employment of the local police forces for partisan political purposes by traditional rulers, politicians, political parties and governments of the day in the Northern and Western regions.<sup>xii</sup> The first major reorganization of the Nigeria Police Force was done in 1986 when it was divided into seven area commands and five directorates (criminal investigations, logistics, supplies, training and operations) which former were again divided into provinces and divisions. The

command was headed by a commissioner of police while the directorates and the rest of the divisions were under deputy inspectors general and local officers respectively.

The reorganization of the Nigeria Police in 1986 was followed by yet another in 1989. This latter exercise saw the retention of the zonal arrangements and the creation of a Quick Intervention Force in each state, separate from the mobile police units, a Federal Investigation and Intelligence Bureau (FIIB) in place of the Directorate of Intelligence and Investigation and three other directorates, namely those of operations, administration and logistics. The Directorate of Operations was subdivided into four units – operations, training, communications and police mobile force while that of Administration was split into administration, budget and personnel subdivisions. Similarly, the Directorate of Logistics was divided into procurement, workshop/transport, supply and work/maintenance. But these reorganizations have not achieved much in terms of the promotion of an adequate and acceptable type of internal security.

#### **4. PRESENT STATE OF INTERNAL SECURITY, LAW AND ORDER**

The evidence that the reorganization of the Nigeria Police Force has not translated into an adequate and right type of internal security for the country can be gauged from the attitude of the average citizen towards the police and its activities of. The average Nigerian regards the Nigeria Police with distrust. He would prefer to have very little to do with the police as he is more likely to be in danger with the police than without him. This is because the police often kill, maim and detain people arbitrarily and with impunity<sup>xiii</sup>, extort money and, generally, pervert the course of justice. In short, the police are “more adept at paramilitary operations and exercise of force than at community functions or crime prevention, detection and investigation”.<sup>xiv</sup> This is proof that the Nigeria Police Force has not been sufficiently internalized as a truly national security outfit<sup>xv</sup>; and it would take more than a mere posting of a large number of police officers to their native areas as directed by the military regime of General Ibrahim B. Babangida in 1989 to achieve that.

As regards crime prevention, the Nigeria Police Force has not been able to fight offence. This is particularly the case in respect of serious crime which has grown to alarming proportions since the 1980s. Admittedly, part of this failure may not be unconnected with underfunding and/or misappropriation of funds and lack of equipment. Take, for example, the operating budget of the Nigeria Police in the 1980s: this ranged from N360 to N521 million while capital allocations amounted to N566 million in the same period. The money was used to acquire new communications equipment, transport and weapons to combat the rising level of crime. This level of funding of the Force, which is about fifty *per cent* of its needs, amounts to running it on a shoestring.<sup>xvi</sup>

But then the institution is also known to be corrupt, particularly its top echelons and this has opened it to being subservient to the rich and powerful even in the rendering of service. The extent of the corruption perpetrated by an Inspector General of Police in the 2000s was nothing but pathological. He amassed \$150 million in Swiss bank accounts, \$200 million in London and N500 million in various denominations in Nigeria. In addition, he maintained fictitious bank accounts into which were paid money stolen from police coffers and proceeds of bribery<sup>xvii</sup> Corruption at the lower levels of the police is more perverse but equally scandalous. A former Inspector General of Police, Mohammed D. Abubakar, has described the situation thus:

Police duties have become commercialised... Our men are deployed to rich individuals and corporate entities such that we lack manpower to provide security for the common man. Our investigations departments cannot equitably handle matters unless those involved have money to part with. Complainants suddenly become suspects at different investigation levels following spurious petitions filed with the connivance of police officers. Our police stations, State CID and operations offices have become business centres and collection points for rendering returns from all kinds of Squads and Teams set up for the benefit of superior officers. Our Special Anti Robbery Squads (SARS) have become killer teams, engaging in deals for land speculators and debt collection. Toll stations in the name of check-points adorn our highways with policemen shamelessly collecting money from motorists in the full glare of the public.<sup>xviii</sup>

Another factor militating against ensuring adequate internal security and the maintenance of law and order is the strength of the Nigeria Police Force which, according to the incumbent Inspector General, stood at 300,892 men and women in December, 2017.<sup>xix</sup> This figure contrasts sharply with the total of 371, 800 given as the strength of the force in 2009<sup>xx</sup> which goes to confirm the assertion of the present Finance Minister that the organization included 80,115 non-existent police officers. In any case, the fact of the matter is that the present numerical strength of the Nigeria Police Force is inadequate to meet the security needs of a vast, diverse, populous and, more recently, increasingly violent country. Indeed, the United Nations' recommendation on police per capita ratio is 1to 400. This would require a total of 495,000 police men and women to provide a reasonably acceptable level of security for country's population which is estimated by the government to stand at 198, 000,000 million in 2018.<sup>xxi</sup>

However, perhaps, the most serious of these factors in not only interfering with the ability of the Police to provide security and law and order but resulting in increased insecurity and inefficiency of the outfit is collusion with criminals, particularly armed robbers.<sup>xxii</sup> A case in point is the connivance of the police with the notorious gang of armed robbers led by Lawrence Anini which

terrorized the old Bendel state in the 1890s.<sup>xxiii</sup> Some police officers, particularly George Iyamu provided protection for the gang, supplied it with arms as well as furnish it with intelligence about plans of the police. To crown it all, the police, according to Anini, entered into a secret agreement with him in 1986 to destroy evidence against members of his gang. It is not unlikely that it is in this connection that the gang was able to operate with such defiance of authorities that it became a national scandal. An almost similar case of police abetment of crime was replicated in the 10980s in Borno state where a senior officer of the rank of an Assistant Commissioner of Police supplied weapons to a ruthless gang of young armed criminals who robbed and killed people at the Lagos Bridge in the state capital, Maiduguri. In short, these instances of collusion with armed robbers are a tip of an iceberg of a general practice of police abetment of violent heists across the country in the 1980s and 1990s. In those decades even highways were farmed out to armed robbers.

Given these considerations, the most prominent role of the Nigeria Police today in the quest for internal security and law and order consists of providing orderlies to top government functionaries and the legislators, cover for important buildings, mostly banks and government lodges and bloody suppression of unrest as happened, for example, at Bakolori in 1981 and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in May 1986. What little else the police routinely do by way of providing general security is the mounting of roadblocks across the country in the name of providing safer highways and preventing armed robbery. But the roadblocks have been turned into a major means of extorting money mostly from commercial vehicles.<sup>xxiv</sup> These roles of the Police amount to providing internal security only for the state and the propertied classes and, over and above that, to enriching themselves at the expense of their hapless victims. The concern of the Police with these functions has ignored what may be considered to be the main aspects of internal security and law and order, namely the protection of citizens' lives, limbs, property and rights, the enforcement of laws and prevention of crimes.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The main conclusions that can be drawn from the foregoing is that the Nigeria Police Force is, in its present form, a colonial survival that was, by tradition, given not only to viewing internal security and law and order from the standpoint of its erstwhile colonial masters but has carried with it that perspective to the service of their new masters. Consequently, the Nigeria Police has not, and cannot, provide the type of internal security and law and order that should be the order of the day under a democratic system. The solution lies in reforming the institution so as to make it a truly national security outfit imbued with the ideals of integrity, accountability and of providing impartial and selfless service to the citizens. At the same time, it should be adequately

funded, provided with the necessary equipment and assisted in every way possible. This will require an exceedingly strong political will on the part of the country's leadership.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> See, Alemika, E. E. O. and Chukwuma I. C., Analysis of Police and Policing in Nigeria: (Cleen Foundation, Lagos), 2005.
- <sup>ii</sup> [http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/national\\_security/nigeria\\_national\\_security\\_nigeria\\_police\\_force.html](http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/national_security/nigeria_national_security_nigeria_police_force.html), p. 1. Unless otherwise stated, the rest of the following discussion is based on this source.
- <sup>iii</sup> A. A. Fari "The Annexation of the Niger-Benue Region: A Study in Anglo-African Relations between 1850 and 1901" (University of Liverpool Ph. D. thesis, 1988), p. 304.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 1.
- <sup>v</sup> Fari, *op. cit.*, p. 304.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 390-391.
- <sup>vii</sup> R. A. Adeleye, *power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804 – 1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*, London: Longman, 1971, pp.179 -185.
- <sup>viii</sup> Alemika E. E. O. and Chukwuma I. C., pp. 8-9.
- <sup>ix</sup> Onoge, O. F., "Social conflicts and Crime Control in Colonial Nigeria in T. N. Tamuno et al (eds), Policing in Nigeria: Past, Present and Future (Malthouse Lagos, 1993), p. 178.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3
- <sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Alemeka, E. E. O. and Chukwuma I. C. *op cit.* p. 13.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Photius coutsoukis:  
[https://www.photius.com/courties/nigeria/national\\_security/Nigeria\\_national\\_security\\_nigeria\\_police\\_force.html](https://www.photius.com/courties/nigeria/national_security/Nigeria_national_security_nigeria_police_force.html), p.2.
- <sup>xv</sup> What is meant by internalizing of the Police Force is best captured in the attitude of old women in Britain who, because they find it difficult to sleep at night would sit with their telephones by the window observing any unusual or suspicious goings on and reporting same instantly to the police. This type of behavior comes only as a result of the belief that the police is one's police.
- <sup>xvi</sup> <http://www.photius.com>, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

- <sup>xvii</sup> E. C. Onyeozili, "Obstacles to Effective Policing in Nigeria", *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*. vol.1, no.1, p.42, April, 2005.
- <sup>xviii</sup> O. Owen, *The Nigerian Police force: Predicaments and Possibilities*: [www.geh.ox.ac.uk/sites/www.odid.ox.ac.uk.files/nw-wp\\_15.pdf](http://www.geh.ox.ac.uk/sites/www.odid.ox.ac.uk.files/nw-wp_15.pdf), July 2014.
- <sup>xix</sup> Intersociety, 80, 115 Ghost Police Officers in Nigeria, Absence Of Answers TO HOW, WHERE AND WHEN Fuels Concerns and Suspicions Of Sectional Victimization: <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com/news/264872/80115-ghost-police-officers-in-nigeria-absence-of-answers.htm>, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018.
- <sup>xx</sup> Intersociety, 8115 Ghost Police Officers in Nigeria.
- <sup>xxi</sup> See Wale Odunsi, FG Reveals Nigeria's Current Population: [dailypost.ng/2018/04/11/fg-revels-nigerias-current-population/](http://dailypost.ng/2018/04/11/fg-revels-nigerias-current-population/).
- <sup>xxii</sup> Ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Discussion about the collusion between the Police and Lawrence Anini is based on Temi Banjo: [www.nigeriamonitor.com/photos-the-true-story-of-one-of-nigerian-most-notorious-armed-robbers-lawrence-anini/](http://www.nigeriamonitor.com/photos-the-true-story-of-one-of-nigerian-most-notorious-armed-robbers-lawrence-anini/), 2015.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> For details of police alone see Human Rights Watch Report, Everyone's in on the Game: Corruption and Human Rights Abuse by the Nigeria Police force: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/08/17/everyones-game/-corruption-and-human-right-abuse-nigeria-police-force>.