

Diagnosing the Key Challenges facing the Nigeria Police: a Foundation for Effective Reform

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Introduction

As an institution, the condition of the Nigeria Police has been in the public domain for as long as the conditions of most Nigerians. There is an organic link between the police and Nigerians and Nigerians and the police. The condition of the police is a reflection of the conditions of Nigerians. The condition of Nigerians is a reflection of the conditions of the police. Thus fixing Nigerians is fixing the police and fixing the police is fixing Nigerians.

These conditions have been the subject of countless interventions in the form of studies, workshops, seminars, symposiums and retreats conducted inside and outside Nigeria by Nigerians including the police and by non-Nigerians interested in Nigeria for their own interests and the police. Consequently, there are myriads of projects, dissertations, theses, policy papers and expert studies with diverse recommendations that came out of these endeavours. The purpose of these interventions were to diagnose the central challenges facing the Nigeria Police Force which were not different from those hitherto accomplished on the one hand and on the other hand situating the resolution of the challenges as foundation for effective reform.

Beyond the unarguable consensus by most analysts and analyses that the challenges of the Nigeria Police gravitated between government's insufficiently insufficient funding and pilfering on the one hand and on the other hand the mismanagement by the police authorities' governance inadequacies, there is little attention given to the organic connection between the conditions of most Nigerians and the Nigeria Police as the fundamental underpinning of the challenges on the one hand and on the other hand the structural challenges embedded in governance generally and its overarching accommodation of other challenges.

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Unless and until the condition of most Nigerians improves – a condition embedded in the nature of politics, state and governance which are the foundations of this improvement – the fortune of the Police will continue to deteriorate. Conversely, the day the fortunes of the police begin to improve for the better, it means there is a corresponding improvement in the fortunes of most Nigerians.

In this paper, we will historicise the police problem as an offshoot of the Nigerian problem, establish the connection of politics, state and governance in the police problem by examining the condition of politics, state and governance as underpinning the condition of governance with governance defined as processes and procedures, institutions and when these are combined, as the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigerians, we will identify the visible or common challenges of the police, the insidious challenges of the police, its resolutions and draw a conclusion.

Historicising the Police Problem in Nigeria

The Nigeria Police is the mother of all of the uniformed and disciplined agencies in Nigeria which comprised the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE).² The MILE is an acronym for the military made up of the navy, army and airforce, the intelligence made up of the internal, external and defence types and the law enforcement beginning with the police, customs, correctional, civil defence, quarantine etc. At one point, these agencies and their work were performed by the police prior to the separation. The decision to carve out these agencies out of the police represented one of the poignant points in the challenges thought to have confronted the police in Nigeria's evolution from 1960 and the political economic play that occasioned this development at different periods.

The focus has been on the police and policing in Nigeria since independence and particularly with the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the democracy project in all of its nuances. Of the nuances in the democracy project, the promotion, protection and advancement of human right has topped the agenda of democratising persons and institutions by civil society, non-governmental, community based organisations and Nigeria's development partners. In this, the police force is the focus. The police has been and is on the cross roads of measuring compliance and non-compliance to human right in the affairs of governments and governances in Nigeria.

² See Adoyi Onoja for the term the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) with the Law Enforcement arm as comprising all the agencies performing law enforcement task of varying specialties beginning with the Nigeria Police. For the concept of the MILE, read Adoyi Onoja, *Methodological Issues in Security and Security Studies in Nigeria* (Monograph 4), Jos, Eiwa, 2020

The coming of community policing was part of the attempt to resolving this pressing concern emanating for Nigeria's enforced enlistment on the democracy train and the requirement to comply with one of its nuances. This begged the question of the historicity, indigeneity and/or development agenda of community policing idea in engendering the type of police that would serve most Nigerians and Nigeria's development partners' expectation of the way Nigeria should be policed.

Prior to the in-road of community policing as panacea to addressing policing challenges in Nigeria, there was the gradual inroad of the military into usurping the roles of the Nigeria Police. This development was engendered by the military's incursion into governance through coups. Over the years of their occupying power, they created the enabling environment that supplanted the police resources with their type of resources in governing law and order. They did this by their poor and inadequate governance and through this the militarisation of Nigeria and the socialisation of most Nigerians into their ways. Consequently, there was the loss of confidence amongst most Nigerians in the police's ability to guarantee their safety and thus the police's inability to perform its statutory task of civil law enforcement.

The military's self-invitation has since transformed into permanent presence occasioned by the intensity of Nigeria's deepening and worsening phases of the post-colonial crises. Their stay albeit permanent stay was justified – whenever this becomes necessary – by Section 217 subsection 2c and the ubiquitous Section 14 subsection 2b. The latter essentially focused on the "security" part of the "security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". The need for the military to remain as one of the accompanying faces of law enforcement or what has been ubiquitously called security³ has deepened since 1999. Indeed beginning in 2007, following the transition within transition and the need to sustain this democracy and, to justify the continuous presence of the military, there has been in place an unspoken and unwritten understanding of the political economic type centred on "security".⁴ This political economy of security seeks to aggregate the interests and assuage the fears and expectations of the elite leaderships of the political class and the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) in the governance of Nigeria.

Therefore with each side playing its role (the political class sustaining poor and inadequate governance at all levels thus weaponising underdevelopment and proliferating unemployment, inequality and poverty on the one hand and on the other hand the MILE class perfunctorily performing its task of picking the pieces from the former's affairs) to oil the wheel of the political economy of security, not only would there be endless justification putting security first before any other issue in the staple of governance. The police, as the face

³ Read Adoyi Onoja, *"SECURITY": the Known Unknown in Nigeria*, Jos, Eiwa, 2022

⁴ Read Adoyi Onoja, *The Making of a Political Economy of "Security" in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* (Monograph 11), Jos, Eiwa, 2024

of law enforcement inside Nigeria, become the whipping child of what has been called insecurity and the persistence of insecurity because of their inability to resolve the problem.

Of recent, there are two sides to the history of the police problem in Nigeria. The first side was when the Cold War ended resulting in the unveiling of the shaky unsettled post-Cold War worlds. One of these was the consolidation of the democracy and economic liberalisation projects began surreptitiously by Britain, United States and the Breton Wood institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s and escalated with the collapse of the defunct Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. The second side arose from the first and was closely connected to the built-up expectations of most Nigerians on the account of democracy of opportunities, the release of pent-up emotions built up on account of military rule authoritarian environment and the failure of civil rule government to deliver opportunities to match peoples' expectation for improved livelihood and lives.

The Nigeria Police Force became the buffer between government and the people as they were confronted with rising crime, criminality, protests, demonstrations, riots and ethnic and religious intolerance on the one hand and on the other hand the orchestrated spectre of terrorism, insurgency, banditry and kidnapping in all of its diversity. This was amidst a police confronted by the challenges of neglects and inadequacies of personnel, equipment, declining morale and distrustful communities.

Politics, State and Governance in Diagnosing the Police Problem in Nigeria

Governance is at the centre of diagnosing the key challenges facing the police. It is not possible to talk about governance without mentioning politics and the state. There is a relationship between politics, state and governance and thus the unending crisis in the police. The governance type in Nigeria derives from the character of politics and the state. This is because it is politics that produces the state. In turn, it is the state that produces government. The politics and state in Nigeria, using Leftwich's argument, is the type that generates, sustain and protect a dependent and ineffective capacity for governance.⁵

Consequently, governance in Nigeria is the dependent and ineffective type resulting in corruption or the abuse of entrusted power for private gains. Corruption engenders failure to deliver services hence the crises that generates conflicts in the polity. The trajectory of the state in Nigeria continues to deteriorate in the hands of the group one analyst called the ruining class.⁶ The ruining class which came in phases has been in control of politics since the

⁵ Adrian Leftwich, "Governance, Democracy and Development in the Third World", *Third World Quarterly*, Volume 14, Number 3, Democratisation in the Third World, 1993: 605-624

⁶ The analyst is Dele Farotimi, a foremost critic in Nigeria

commencement of the present Republic. This explained the condition of governance and thus police governance in Nigeria.

According to Buzan,⁷ the state is a form of political organisation which transcends all other political units as standard of political legitimacy. The state dominates political legitimacy and authority and, command over instruments of coercion of the civil and military, intelligence and law enforcement types. The state comprises ideas, institutions and physical body. To attain political legitimacy, authority and command of the institutions of the state, the ideas of the state must be agreed upon by the occupants of a geographical area where the state operates. It is the ideas that will govern the institutions and the institutions will in turn govern the physical body or geographical area.

If the state is properly constituted with the consent of most of the occupants of a geographical area, for instance Nigeria, the state becomes the soul of most Nigerians. The ideas and institutions of the state function impartially towards meeting the expectations of most Nigerians in Nigeria. The state is the impartial and permanent organ of the country, in place to enforce ideas, through its institutions managed by the government, at any particular period. The government is chosen by most of the people at time interval to govern the physical body using the ideas and institutions in order to achieve the ideas and ideals of the state.

Arising from this, the question is: does Nigeria have a state of this type, with ideas and ideals, serving as its overarching philosophy or nature, meaning and purpose, for the governance of institutions including the police?

The reality of the Nigeria is that what is the state in Nigeria at any given time is transient. Unlike a properly constituted state that stayed impartially and permanently committed and dedicated to attaining the ideals contained in the ideas of the state, the transient state in Nigeria required partial and complete reconstitution at the end of every administration in order to serve the new government or administration's philosophy. The state is thus a coalition made up of the president, associates, parties, ethnics/religions/regions/bureaucratic and military, intelligence and law enforcement cliques at any given time. The nature of the

⁷ See Barry Buzan (1991), *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, London and New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf

transient state in Nigeria makes no distinction between the state and government. The government is the state and the state is the government.

Consequently, the state in Nigeria is completely partial. The implication for governance as institutions, processes and procedures and using the World Bank's perspective as the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources⁸ for the benefit of most Nigerians is immense. In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, this tendency of the state heightened in the eight years that began in 2015 where there were several wings of the state personified by powerful individuals in the government.

The state is central to any discourse of government and governance in Nigeria and thus diagnosis of challenges of the police and the foundation for effective reform. This state is central to the extent that the state, through its ideas and institutions, gives effect to government and governance. The assertion by the World Bank in 1989 that behind the litanies of Africa's development problems was the crisis of governance⁹ captured the condition of politics and the state in the persistent of this crisis.

The state in most sub-Saharan Africa remained the way it has been when the colonial authorities handed over power to the newly minted African elites of the period. The fact that the state, in most sub-Saharan Africa, relied on juridical and not empirical sovereignty¹⁰ for its survival clearly testify to its illegitimacy amongst the people. Since Nigeria's major challenge is governance, the state is responsible for this challenge.

This is the condition that produces the challenges in the police as one of the pivotal arm of the state. This is the condition that requires resolution in order to create the enabling environment for the commencement of the reform that should position the police and Nigeria for optimum performance.

Diagnosing the Challenges of the Police in Nigeria

Beyond itemising the familiar challenges of the police in Nigeria, the discourse this far touched on the fundamentals of the challenges. Of these fundamentals is the reconstitution of Nigeria with a Nigerian philosophy or nature, meaning and purpose of Nigeria. The major

⁸ World Bank, *Sub Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington DC: The World Bank, 1989

⁹ World Bank, *Sub Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth...*

¹⁰ Read Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg (1986), "Sovereignty and Underdevelopment: Juridical Statehood in the African Crisis", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol. 24. No. 1(Mar.): 1-31

challenge that is confronting Nigeria and thus the bedrock of the Nigerian crises is the lack of philosophy. This philosophy should ask and answer the questions what is Nigeria, whose Nigeria, what is a Nigeria issue and how can Nigeria be achieved. These four fundamental questions straddle philosophy, legislation, policy and strategy.

This philosophy differs from personal, group and/or government philosophy. Personal, group and government or regime philosophy last for as long as the person, group and government last in position of power. A Nigeria Philosophy encapsulates the vision and mission of Nigeria. This philosophy exists for other philosophies including personal, group and government to derive their inspiration and to key into and work towards meeting its objectives. A vision of this nature, made by most Nigerians, for most Nigerians, will resist the few Nigerians and non-Nigerians saboteurs, bent on derailing the overriding mission of the attainment of the Nigerian ideas and ideals embedded in the vision.

In my opening statement, I posited that there was an organic connection or link between the wellbeing of Nigerians and the wellbeing of the police and/or the wellbeing of the police and the wellbeing of Nigerians. Of the agencies of policing and particularly the genre called law enforcement, none is as close and/or synonymous to the general population as the police. Therefore whatever affects the general population affects the police. The wellbeing of the general population is a barometer for gauging the wellbeing of the police. It follows therefore that the reasons for the lack of wellbeing of Nigerians applies to the wellbeing of the police.

Governance is at the base of the lack of wellbeing of Nigerians. The lack of wellbeing of Nigerians is not because of the absence of institutions, processes and procedures and resources even as I defined and gauged governance from these three resources. Nigeria parades the best of these three resources that makes up the essence of governance in this context. Of the three perspectives of viewing governance – institutions, processes and procedures, and the management of human and material resources for the benefit of people – the first two perspectives of governance, once in place, work to drive the third perspective of governance.

There has been systemic failure at the level of processes and procedures and institutions to drive the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of most Nigeria for the better part of Nigeria's existence as a state. As the World Bank observed over three decades ago, behind the litanies of crisis bedvelling sub Saharan Africa was governance. The criminal unwillingness of Nigeria's ruling class at all levels to use Nigeria's human and material resources to benefit most Nigerians ensures that the mental levels of

Nigerians and the police remain commensurate with their developmental or poverty, unemployment and inequality levels.

The resolution of the supposed ineffectiveness and inefficiencies of the police which is the result of the faulty and baseless comparison of the performance of the police with other police services in other countries particularly the developed society and/or the use of the sterling performances of the police on foreign missions, is to address in the short, medium and long term basis, the crisis of governance that continues to engender underdevelopment or unemployment, inequality and poverty amongst most Nigerians and its attendant attitudinal dispositions in all spheres.

It is not possible to tackle police inadequate funding, staffing, equipment, welfare and corruption – the proverbial open challenges of the police – at the strategic, tactical and operational level without addressing systemic governance problem bedevelling the poor state of the general population. It is governance crisis that engender the poor and inadequate funding of the police which in turn exacerbates the problem of staffing, equipment, welfare and the spate of corruption that characterise the police.

Most, if not all the institutions in Nigeria suffers from the governance malaise at the micro level. It is not better with the institutions within the category I called the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE). The difference with the police is that the reach of the police is deeper and wider when compare with these other institutions. The other agencies within the MILE have sparse contact with the people owing to their schedules that shield them from the intrusive glare of the public compare with the police.

Conclusion

It is time we quit the merry-go-round occasional jamboree of convening conferences, symposiums, seminars, workshops, expert groups meetings and/or borrowing or seeking external assistances and development partnerships, in the bid to finding the solution to the problem confronting the police and policing in Nigeria. To continue in this is to continue to engender corruption.

The solution to the problem of the police in Nigeria has always been with Nigerians. The solution is to begin to govern effectively and efficiently, using existing institutions and processes and procedures, the human and material resources Nigeria is endowed with, for the benefit of most Nigerians. Once this governance is place, the police, as an extension of

Nigerians, will fall in line and the police we deserve will begin to take shape in ideals and in reality.

The sad reality, which we have refuse to accept, because of the warped tendencies to compare what we have with what other societies have, is that at the level we are in Nigeria and with the governance type in place so far, we have the best police service there can be for Nigerians. To continue to compare the Nigeria police with other police services in the world and/or because the police performed so creditably in foreign mission, is to continue to miss the point in attempting to create the ideal police we want.

In continuing to talk about and blame funding, staffing, equipment and welfare for the deplorable condition of the police, we would continue to scratch the surface of the sub-systemic condition arising from the systemic conditions. The solution is to deal with the systemic condition in order to deal with the sub systemic crisis as is the case with the police and other institutions in Nigeria.

The Nigeria Police, using Nigeria's best practice primarily, and global - West Africa, Africa, the South - best practices secondarily and assuming these exist, is the best police Nigerians can have.

The Nigeria Police should be commended and not condemned. Just as most Nigerians should be commended and not condemned for making the best out of an orchestrated bad governance enabling environment created by Nigeria's ruling class.