

An Overview of Army/Police Clashes in Nigeria

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Abstract

The overlapping historical origin of the Army and the Police has been linked to their rivalries in recent times. The overlapping historical origin and the dramatic status transformation mostly in favour of the Army is argued to have engendered among the forces the struggle for seniority and superiority. This occupational twist in favour of the Army was underscored by the uniqueness of the military job coupled with its high risk. But the Police did not only loose their status, there were also exposed to forms of repressory measures by which the Army targeted at weakening the Police force. These repressory measures include operational jealousy, suspicion, denial and high jacking of security equipments procure to enhance the performance of the Police. These situations in essence have been the source of the “Cold war” between the forces, upon which destructive clashes are built. Therefore this piece of work examines the causes and effects of the clashes to the society. It is therefore suggested that the Forces need training and retraining and improving in salary and welfare package.

Keywords: *Army, Clashes, Status, Police and Security Operatives.*

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Background to the Study

The root of the Army/Police clashes was trace as far back as the mid 1970s. prior to this period the Nigeria Police which was the nearest occupational group to the Army in terms of Origin, Status, Pay and conditions of service, did enjoyed better status and pay. But after the 1966 coup and the corresponding civil was between 1967 and 1970 within which time the military occupied the driver's seat (saddle of the government), the Army had through their privileged vantage position conferred by their occupation effected a status coup, which marked the reverse of the pre 1966 state of affairs in Police/Army status comparism. The salary differentials between the military and the Police Forces became widened in favour of the military in 1981 and definitely still more under the Babangida military presidency of 1985 – 1993. These public security forces were in the cause of this development dragged into a form of “Cold war” as the sudden status twist did not go down well with other occupational groups in the contry (Adekanye 1993).

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine historical origin of the Army and the Police Forces clashes in Nigeria, linked to their rivalries in recent times.

Adekanye (1993) further asserted that:

Thus it was that the Nigerian soldiers were able to elevate themselves above not just their peer in Nigeria Police but other groups hitherto at the apex of the occupational prestige hierarchy.

The above no doubt have inspired series of social un rest and agitations among other occupational groups in the country that characterized the entire military regimes and specifically, the reign of Ibrahim B. Babangida.

Coser argued that, conflict between groups or individuals stem from the withdrawal of legitimacy. People are sufficiently aroused for conflict (Clash) when channels for expressing grievances do not exist and when the deprived's desire for membership into higher ranks are thwarted, at this point withdrawal of legitimacy occurs. With the withdrawal of legitimacy conflict (Clash) becomes the ultimate end product.

It is posited that, individuals and groups are likely to work for peace only when the interest at stake is mutually beneficial but when their interest are diametrically opposed and incompatible, they are likely to be involved in destructive conflict not mindful of their past cordial relationship. (Metcalf, R.L and Metcalf, R. A 1993).

Literature Review

Causes of the Clashes (Conflict)

Systemic failure is considered one of the potent causes of conflict especially within and between the Army and the Police forces in Nigeria Sankara (2005) asserted that:

Men and women of the Nigeria Police, many of whom have to pay their way to join the Police, train under one of the most in human conditions imaginable, as attested to by the state of the Police Colleges and after training, buy their own Uniform, boots, writing materials, torch light and all other working tools. Beside these, they have to go on for upward of four or six months before they can earn first monthly salary, which amount to nothing at the end of the day.

A forum of the military, Police and paramilitary public relations (MILPOPPROF) asserts that, the incessant violent clashes between the various security agencies and Army/Police in particular in Nigeria are largely due to the dearth in information available to these forces about their sisters forces. This has led to widespread ignorance especially among the junior officers in such matters as the complementary roles of other forces to the actualization of own roles, areas of mutual co-operation and exclusively as well as their perception of the ranks and organizational structure of other forces. This condition has more often than not, consciously or un consciously led many unnecessary and avoidable violent clashes in recent times. The ignorance about other forces is however attributed to the lack of professional forum for regular interaction especially among the lower rank and more importantly, the low educational qualification required for their entry into the various security forces.

Furthermore, Marizu have identified myriads of factors responsible for the fracas among the public security forces. Such reasons include among others, defending a regime interest, economic poverty and ignorance of the lower ranking officer. The skirmishes between the lower ranks especially among the Armed forces and the Police are largely due to the ignorance and perhaps a case of defending regime interest. Another factor could be economic poverty because of the officers have maintained solid discipline, it has been identified that indiscipline, ignorance and poor training among others are the bane of the clashes.

Similarly, it has also been stressed that, of all the causes of the Army, Police and paramilitary forces clash in Nigeria, illegal business “Stand tall” for instance, Taiwo (2007) submits that:

The Friction among members of those government agencies that necessitated the birth of this association are mostly perpetrated by the lower ranks especially among the Armed Forces and Police, or Customs and Police and some times between Customs and Soldiers who may want to engage themselves in a manner inimical to Customs, laws and regulation especially as it affects smuggling. I know that the engagement of these personnel in this act is largely due to ignorance and economic poverty. The junior officers who display acts of gross indiscipline require orientation. They must eschew intolerance and always embrace our traditional espritde-corps and camaraderie in the discharge of their essential functions.

The forces have been accused of various degrees of excesses on their host communities. This has been the defining characteristics of the forces since their colonial days and therefore, not only been responsible for conflicts with other security agencies, but have equally alienated them from the masses of the people, since there were not accountable to the colonized but to the colonisers.

Omoigui (2006) present myriads of reasons for destructive rivalries between the Army and the Police in Nigeria. Extortion, complex protections, the desire to avenge dishonor suffered at the hands of the Police etc. are some of the reasons for their clashes. Omoigui further asserted that:

The most common scenarios for these clashes include traffic Police demanding vehicle particulars and driving licenses from military personnel or seeking to search their private vehicles, complex protection deals between servicemen in uniform who ride for free in public transport vehicles and then proceed to protect their host from bribe seeking Policemen, or the desire of the military personnel to retrieve friends and colleagues who have been arrested by the Police for one reason or the other. Sometimes it is desire to avenge perceived dishonor suffered at the hands of the police. Another potential for the crises is when the Police engage in hot pursuit of suspects who for one reason or another then take refuge inside military Barracks. One particular scenario that is not fully appreciated by the public revolve around the fact that in order to make ends meet many junior soldiers own and operate motorcycles (Okada) with which they engage in the business of public transportation after normal working hours. This provides a lot of opportunities for conflict with traffic Policemen.

Furthermore, the overlapping historical origin of the Army and the Police has been linked to their rivalries in recent times. The overlapping historical origin and the Army is argued to have engendered among the forces the struggle for seniority and superiority, which in essence have been the source of the “Cold war” between the forces, upon which destructive clashes are built.

Lack of regular interaction between the forces especially among officers of the lower ranks is argued to be responsible for the clashes.

Ekong (2007) submitted that:

We are very happy to see the forum making this move, personally, I have participated in the presidential retreat, we called a spade – a spade no interaction. It is very painful reading about needless clashes involving uniform personnel.

Furthermore, the joint or common origin of the Army and the Police and the early superior status enjoyed by the Police, which they lost to the Army through military rule may have been linked in part to their persistent clashes, from their origin the Police was not only senior to the Army, but they also enjoyed superior status and remuneration until the first military incursion into civil Politics, which saw loosing their erst while superior status to the Army.

This occupational twist in favour of the Army was underscored by the uniqueness of the military job coupled with its high risks such as the risk of the over hanging death. But the Police did not only loose their status, they were also exposed to forms of repressory measures by which the Army targeted at weakening the Police force. Such repressory measures included operational jealousy and suspicion, denial and hijacking of security equipment procured to enhance the performance of the Police. This situation, which commence from Shagari's regime, lasted throughout the military era in Nigeria and may have era engendered a “Cold War” between the security agencies (Adekanye 1993).

Effects of the Forces Clashes

The effects of clashes between the forces is on the provision of the security to the Nation. The clashes have caused lack of confidence in security agencies, the public have lost confidence in the security forces to provide security they need, hence the increase in the desire of well to do Nigerians to seek protection from informal security organizations. The clashes have specifically caused insecurity in the land, caused avoidable death and destruction of lives and properties, encouraged lawlessness in the land and have disrupted business in the commercial headquarters of Nigeria. The violent clashes have dented the hallowed image of the Nation as well as the reputation of the forces. Certainly, both the Army and the Police have failed Nigerians. They have not lived up to their expectation, their target is the same to make it all at all cost.

Conclusion

Security is therefore the primary and necessary condition for the smooth running of every other sectors of the social system. To guarantee the security of lives and properties as well the enjoyment of the in alienable rights of the citizenry, formal agencies of social control such as the military, the Police, other quasi-Police agencies and economic regulatory agencies were created. It is expected that, these public security agencies develop operational synergy that will enhance adequate provisions of security to Nigerians.

However, study have shown that, rather than the inter-agencies co-operation, the security forces especially the Army and the Police have been involved in avoidable but destructive clashes in various parts of Nigeria culminating in confusion, disruption of business, fear death of several citizens and destructive of unquantifiable properties in recent times.

Recommendation

At this juncture the Recommendation shows proffer lasting solution to this dangerous social problems. There is need for the government to intensify the efforts and the roles of the security agencies and make sure the receive the same remuneration as they are equally important. There should be professional forum for regular interaction among members of the security operatives through seminars, workshop etc. There should be regular training of the security operatives that is joint training and joint task force for cordial relationship. There is need for the government to train in competent personnel and more importantly specify entry requirement into the various security forces.

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