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Research Paper

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**OF DANCING PYTHON AND SMILING CROCODILE:
INTERROGATING MILITARY VISIBILITY IN NIGERIA'S
DEMOCRATIC SPACE**

Abstract: *The struggle against military rule was sustained by the hope of democracy, bringing peace and security to the people and sending the soldiers back to the barracks where they belonged. However, two decades into the democratic order, the Nigerian people continually witness military boots around them, coming under different operational names in 30 out of the 36 states of the country. The massive deployment of the military in a country under democratic rule presents a paradox that warrants interrogation. The study identifies the reasons and consequences of such deployment on the citizens and the practice of democracy in the country.*

Keywords: *Democracy, discontentment, military deployment, Nigeria, violence.*

Introduction

In 1999, Nigeria transitioned into a democratic era. This was after long years of military rule that was characterized by oppression, intimidation, exclusion and, naturally, high military visibility in the affairs of the people. During the years of military rule, officers occupied all the major administrative and political strata of the society. Specifically, the Nigerian armed forces had played a significant role in Nigerian politics since the military putsch of January 15, 1966, that brought them to power. For well over thirty years, the armed forces intervened in all aspects of political life; it dominated the government almost entirely and subsumed all other institutions. Throughout this period, the military became the main instrument of state power and social control. The top officers used the opportunity to amass economic powers and other privileges as well.

Due to a combination of long in power, dictatorial actions and the global movement towards democratic order, the presence of the military became non-acceptable to the majority of the people. This was part of the reasons for the long-drawn struggle for democracy that was waged in Nigeria. In essence, the many years of sustained struggle for democracy were predicated on disdain for military presence in the Nigerian body politic. It was thus expected that the return of democracy would restore the military to the barracks where they would face the constitutional roles assigned to them, which are basically two: one, to maintain territorial integrity and defend the nation against external aggression, and two, to suppress insurrection and act in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president with the approval of the national assembly (Ajala, 2019). However, the hope of complete military disengagement from the public scene has yet to materialize since the return of democracy in 1999. Rather, its presence has been heightened with military operations in almost all the states of the federation. The Armed Forces have launched over 40 different operations and exercises in the last five years in different parts of the country to contain banditry, terrorism and threats to peace and orderliness (Daily Trust, 2020). What is responsible for this trend? What implications on the Nigerian state and its democratic practice? What does it say about the Nigerian state? This study interrogates these questions.

The Military, Democracy and Internal Security

The origin of the state, as conceived by the social contract theorists, hinged on the security of lives and properties as a matter of primary duty. Thomas Hobbes, in his treatise, had identified the state of nature as the prevailing order before the state came into existence. The emergence of the state, following the social contract, signified the end of the state of nature. Although there are variations in the description of the state of nature by the three leading proponents of the social contract theory, yet, there is unanimity that it was not a desirable entity and that the full potential of man was not harnessed. In the account of Hobbes, the state of nature was characterized by ignorance, war, chaos and general disorder, and in such a situation, the life of man was “solitary, brutish, nasty and short”. The desire of the people to escape from the state of nature brought about the idea of the state. Part of the argument of the social contract theory is that the people decided to entrust their right of self-defense to a sovereign, in exchange for the security of life and property. The primary duty of the state, in the contention of the social contract theory, is the provision of security for the people and their property. All other functions are secondary.

In order to achieve the primary objective, the state set up various security outfits with different functions, all geared towards safeguarding the people. One of such institutions is the military. The military has emerged as the main coercive agent of the state (Pion-Berlin, 2017:206) and as a major tool of the state to realize its basic objective of securing territorial integrity. Under being the custodian of the means of violence, the military institution represents the essence of the state, and in some environments, it assumes the leadership position. In societies with a history of military usurpation of political power, the major challenge is how to keep it off the scene after disengagement. Across the globe in the last three decades, armed forces have acknowledged the values of democracy for their countries and for their military services.

It is usually argued that a democratic system of government guarantees the peaceful resolution of conflicts, given the fact that democratic institutions are capable of altering the risk of internal conflicts by facilitating effective bargaining and reducing commitment problems (Hegre, 2014). In this instance, conflicting claims by rival social groups are solved by majority votes or consensual agreements. In a democracy, there are decisive features of the armed forces within

the context of a freely and fairly elected government that represents the people (Blair, 2016) given the fact that they are established under provisions of a constitution or set of laws approved by a legislature. Thus, “when they are used within the country, whether it is to suppress an armed revolt, enforce a border, or provide relief following a natural disaster, it is for a limited time in support of domestic government organizations under special authorities and strict controls” (Blair, 2016:6).

Many nations, including long-established democracies, face an urgent need to recast civil-military relations along democratic lines as many of them confront conflicting decisions “over such civil-military issues as defense budgeting, the roles and missions of the armed forces, and the mutual responsibilities of officers and civilians for effective democratic civilian oversight” (Pantev et al 2005:6). Historically, after independence in many African countries for instance, the national armies were created to, in theory, ensure defense and territorial integrity and to contribute to the nation-building project. In practice however, the military has evolved to play other roles, including internal policing and involvement in partisan politics (Matlosa and Zounmenou, 2011) thereby intruding upon the sovereignty of the people who elected representatives to government (Bailie, 2018). The April 2019 military coup *d'état* in Sudan and the August 2020 military coup *d'état* in Mali, in the twenty-first century, attest to this trend and therefore, point to the seeming failure of democratization.

Discourse on democratic civil-military relations has dwelt largely on the role of the military in security provision. In the estimation of Samuel Huntington (1977), the military exists basically to preserve the territorial integrity of the state. Also, according to legislation, the military is assigned to be responsible for external defense, while the Police are primed to be in charge of "internal security". However, the problem that ensues is at what point does internal threat become problematic to call for the involvement of the military? This question has brought about two significant lines of argument. On the one hand, there is the argument that the line separating internal security from external security has blurred in contemporary times, which necessitates the involvement of the military in internal security provision. According to Peter Andreas and R. Price (2001:3), “the distinction between law enforcement and military missions breaks down, too; military tasks become increasingly domesticated and civilianized, and policing tasks become increasingly internationalized and militarized”.

On the other hand, there is the argument that, according to Greener-Barcham, the blurring of lines between the two should not warrant the military usurping the role of the Police, because the two, in all material particular, are quite different in terms of training and official duties. In this sense, asking one to do the duty of the other is wrong. The military, in particular, is ill-suited to perform the role of the Police, because, in the words of Pion-Berlin (2001), soldiers are trained to kill and destroy the enemy, and therefore are not suitable for actions taking place within the civil society. The military may see the civilians as the enemy, and seek to destroy them.

Moritz Janowitz (1977) had expressed doubts about the feasibility of the military performing the role of the Police, in the sense that it falls below their training and esteem. To him, drafting military forces into the policy arena is demeaning to the military officers and below the status of the profession. He, therefore, expressed strong doubts about the willingness of the top echelon of the military to accept that kind of offer. Building on the Janowitz perspective, Adefisoye and Ariyo (2019:64) aver that “if the military influence on civil participation like supervising elections and other minor activities like dispersing protesters, curbing crime rates in the country and other internal insurrections as discussed in the study, then the military control on the civil government may be too powerful to check”. However, the reality is that the new wars in the contemporary world support the first line of argument. Modern society has shown that crime has grown in such a way that combating it cannot be left in the hands of the Police alone. In the analysis of Pion-Berlin:

The fact is, many countries with serious internal security threats realize they have no choice; they must call on the military to assist in defeating organized crime, especially when police forces are overwhelmed, incapable, or unwilling to do the job themselves. There can be no blanket prohibition on military internal security missions because that would leave powerful criminal elements to operate unimpeded and place citizens at risk (Pion-Berlin, 2001:2).

The foregoing assertion is supported by the fact that internal security can result in severe threats to the corporate existence of a state. Pion-Berlin argues further that:

Internal security also refers to a condition where property, institutions and governments are rendered secure from threats as

well. When a nation faces the gravest of threats—up to and including those of an existential nature--then internal security intersects with national security. When national security is at risk, a country's vital institutions and interests are at stake, not just individuals. This most familiar connotation refers to the safeguarding of the state--its institutions, rulers, and government--and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation itself (Pion-Berlin, 2001:105).

Again, in the modern world, crimes have become highly organized, complex and entrenched and their control cannot be left in the hands of the Police alone. For instance, owing to the inability of the Police to contain violent conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in areas where armed groups are active, the military is usually deployed to restore order and to keep the peace (Musa, 2019). This is the basic argument of Pion-Berlin in his submission that:

When it comes to countering crime, it is the Police that are on the front lines, in most societies. But it has become apparent in recent years that Police are no match for mid-level challengers. Outgunned, outnumbered and out-maneuvered by sophisticated and lethal criminal organizations, Police have not been able to offer citizens the protection they need. On the contrary, they have often been complicit in criminal behavior, succumbing to bribery or intimidation (Pion-Berlin, 2001:107).

Several facts are discernible from the foregoing assertions. One is that the state exists basically to secure lives and properties. Two, the military has emerged as the major essence of the state, by virtue of being the custodian of the means of violence. Three, modern society has witnessed a transformation in the nature and volume of internal threats to the state. Fourth, internal threats can constitute grave threats to the very survival of the state. Five, the Police who are saddled with combating internal insecurity have been found inadequate in several societies, thereby leaving a vacuum. Five, in order to fill the vacuum, the military has to be incorporated into the security architecture for internal operations of the state.

What all the discussions from the two lines of argument boil down to is that the military, even though it is not mandated to do so, has to be drafted to combat internal threats. It is, therefore, a case of situational usage of the military to do a policing job, in deviation from their soldiering duties. It is within this situational frame of analysis that the Nigerian scenario, where the military has become visible in managing internal security, will be situated.

Nigerian security situation and military operations

The nature, frequency and intensity of conflict have generally shifted from wars fought directly between states to various forms of “internal” or intrastate violence. These have, over the past several decades, manifested in organized and large-scale criminal violence, terrorism, insurgencies and guerrilla wars (Szayna et al, 2017). In Nigeria, the changing nature of criminality, which is visible in various forms and dimensions, has made effective maintenance of law and order very difficult for state security actors (Iloh and Nwokedi, 2019). Indeed, the spate of such conflicts has emerged as one of the major challenges facing the Nigerian state since the return of democratic order in 1999; a development that questions “the effectiveness of the Nigerian security architecture, especially that of the Nigerian Police” (Bakare and Aderinola, 2019:32).

As a matter of fact, the country seems to have been confronted with more security challenges in the past decade with devastating consequences for peace, orderliness and co-existence of the Nigerian people. These crises include Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria, militancy in the Niger Delta, kidnapping, raping, ritual killings, killings attributed to herdsmen in various parts of the country; agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), organized raping and the emergence of sundry militias such as the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Egbesu Boys, Ombatse cult, Badoo, One Million Boys, etc. among other widely recognized challenges facing the country.

Over time, in a vicious circle of frustration and repression, the marginalized categories of the population continually agitate for their fair share in national resources by maintaining these militia movements just as the Nigerian leadership tries to consolidate itself in power (Badmus, 2006). The intensity of the carnage wrought by these militant groups, which has put the Nigerian State at the receiving end, is better imagined than experienced (Agbu, 2004:6). Curiously, many of the measures put in place by the Nigerian government to ameliorate the alarming level of insecurity and tame the rampaging violent groups in many parts of the country have seemingly

had little or no impact. This lends credence to the fact that the actualization of specific operations might remain difficult and complex if appropriate strategies are not adopted for such operations.

A look at the various security breaches, which continually signpost the gradual erosion and delegitimization of the state, shows clearly that they transcend all the six geopolitical zones of the country. Given this situation, internal security threats have remained one major challenge threatening not only the security of life and property but also the practice of democracy that returned to the country in 1999. The response of the state has been to deploy federal troops to the various spots in the country, instances of which will be highlighted in what follows.

Table 1: North East Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation Flush	2009	To tackle Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe and Adamawa
2	Operation Restore Order I, II and III	2011	Engage Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe Adamawa
3	Operation Boyona	2013	Engage Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe Adamawa
4	Operation <i>Zaman Lafiya</i>	2013	Engage Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe Adamawa
5	Operation <i>Lafiya Dole</i>	2015	Defeat Boko Haram	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
6	Operation Ruwan Wuta I, II, III and IV	2017-2018	Air Force operation to combat Boko Haram	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
7	Operation Shirin Harbi	2017	To combat restiveness	Bauchi and Gombe

8	Operation Last Hold	2018	Final defeat of Boko Haram	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
9	Operation Deep Punch	2018	To defeat, Boko Haram, kidnapping and rustling	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
10	Operation Positive Identification	2019	To fish out fleeing Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
11	Operation Rattle Snake	2019	To degrade Boko Haram terrorists	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
12	Operation Long Reach I and II	2020	To flush out terrorists and other criminals in the area	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa
13	Operation Long Reach II	2020	To flush out terrorists and other criminals in the area	Borno, Yobe, Adamawa

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 1 shows that the northeastern region has received over a dozen military operations since the return of democracy. The major threats from this area are identified as insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping, cattle rustling and armed robbery. The major actors at the center of it all are suspected Boko Haram elements. This region has recorded the highest number of military operations, and thus, the most volatile of all the zones in the country.

Table 2: North West Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation Sharan Daji	2015	To tackle rustling and armed banditry	Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi, Sokoto and Katsina states.

2	Operation Harbin Kunama I	2017-2019	to tackle cattle rustling, armed banditry and clashes between pastoralists and farmers	Katsina, Sokoto Zamfara and Benue states
3	Operation Harbin Kunama II	2017-2019	to tackle cattle rustling, armed banditry and clashes between pastoralists and farmers in	Katsina, Sokoto Zamfara and Benue states
4	Operation Harbin Kunama III	2017-2019	tackle cattle rustling, armed banditry and clashes between pastoralists and farmers in	Katsina, Sokoto Zamfara and Benue states
5	Operation Dokaji	2019	to deal with cattle rustling, armed banditry, and clashes between pastoralists and farmers	Northwest and Northcentral states
6	Exercise Sahel Sanity	2020	deal with cattle rustling, armed banditry, and clashes between pastoralists and farmers	<i>Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kaduna and Niger states</i>

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 2 shows that the Northwest has a far lesser number of military operations than the Northeast. Here, banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling are the common security breaches in the area. These criminalities have resulted in the death of hundreds of people, leading to a national outcry. It was in the bid to address the increasing killings and lawlessness that military forces were drafted to the region, which led to a series of operations under different names.

Table 3: North-Central Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation Whirl Stroke	2018	to counter armed herdsmen and militia groups	Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Zamfara states
2	Operation Karamin Goro	2018	to combat criminality	Minna-Birnin Gwari-Pandogari and Minna-Sarkin Pawa in Niger and Kaduna states
3	Operation Ayem Akpatuma	2018	to combat banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling and armed militia	Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Niger states
4	Operation Cat Race	2019	to contain perennial insecurity caused by bandits, cattle rustlers and other criminal elements	Niger State

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 3 also shows that the northcentral has the same number of military operations as the northwest. The major security issues there are farmer-herder clashes, cattle rustling and kidnapping. This region came under serious local and international news coverage when a dispute between herders and farmers resulted in the death of hundreds of people in the run-down to the general elections of 2019. The military started a series of operations to address these challenges.

Table 4: South East Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation Egwu Eke (Python Dance II)	2018	Against secession threats from the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)	southeast states
2	Operation Atilogwu, (meaning Operation Dance for Peace)	2019	to address security challenges of armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killings and insurrection. It was a continuation of Python Dance II	southeast states

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 4 shows that the Southeast has a low number of military operations. The only two operations were targeted against kidnapping, armed robbery and succession rhetoric of the Indigenous People of Biafra, a group that seeks the revival of Biafra Republic.

Table 5: South-South Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation Restore Hope	2003	To restore peace to Niger Delta	Niger Delta
2	Operation Pulo Shield	2012	to deal with militants, oil bunkers and kidnapers.	Niger Delta
3	Operation Delta Safe.	2016	To tackle militants and kidnapers	Ondo, Akwa Ibom and the entire Niger Delta
4	Operation Tsare Teku	2017	To tackle	Niger Delta

			militants	
5	Operation Egwu Eke (Python Dance I)	2017	to fight crimes like cultism, militancy, and kidnapping	Niger Delta states

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 5 shows that the South-South zone has the second-highest number of military operations. The security challenges here are mainly pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism and proliferation of ethnic militias. The region has been under military operations for a long time, owing to the fact that it is the region where oil, the mainstay of the economy is located. Agitations for a fair share of the resources have led to a series of agitations by the youths of the place, hence the presence of armed forces for a long time, even before the return of democracy in 1999.

Table 6: South West Geopolitical Zone

S/N	Name of Operation	Year of Formation	Task	Areas of Coverage
1	Operation 777	2018	against kidnapping,- robbery and related criminal activities in the area	Epe and Ogun Waterside in Lagos and Ogun States
2	Operation Python Dance III	2019	tackling violence before, during and after the 2019 general elections	Lagos

Source: Authors' compilation, 2020

Table 6 shows that the Southwest, just like the Southeast, has the least number of military operations. The major security breaches are kidnapping and armed robbery. This region is the most peaceful part of the country.

From the tables, it became very obvious that nearly all the states have a military presence, an indication that the country is facing serious security challenges. Further evidence of this assertion is the presence of military checkpoints at every entrance to each state, where people and motorists are, at times profiled. It is as if the country is under the siege of war. However, in spite of the military involvement in internal security operations going by the aforementioned code names, Nigeria continues to grapple with the same security challenges in all the six geopolitical zones of the country as those perpetrating the criminality keep changing tactics and locations, indicating faulty approaches on the part of the security outfits and perhaps, ulterior motives undergirding government response. This may have informed Dode's (2012:418) submission when he posits that:

The fact is that military operations have to a large extent proved ineffective in solving the civilian crisis in Nigeria. They have been rather, largely used to serve the interest of some political elites. It is politically dangerous to encourage the drafting of military personnel to settle civilian problems in a democracy.

It is in this light that the need to increase the democratization of society and to address the mounting complexity of the internal security crises is gaining momentum. This, no doubt, requires additional competence and professional assessments on the part of security personnel, in addition to the needed political will among leaders to subordinate the armed forces to the civilian leadership and authority.

Impacts of military operations on the civilian population

How the military organizes and conducts field operations in internal security issues, essentially meant for the Police, but requiring a Joint Task Force (JTF) for close integration of efforts to combat large-scale insurrection, has implications for the civilian population. Having pointed out that soldiers are trained to kill and destroy the enemy, particularly in offensive operations against external aggressors, it is not unexpected that their involvement in managing internal security challenges comes with collateral damages, thereby prompting both local and international pressures to improve the military's record on human rights in the country. Of course, numerous

individual attacks on civilians in those conflict spots are reported by different media and human rights organizations. In spite of the fact that attacks should only be directed at combatants and military objectives, as clearly specified in the International Humanitarian Law, “civilians make up the overwhelming majority of the victims of armed conflict” (ICRC, n.d). In a research, the Center for Civilians in Conflict (2015) observes that:

Nigeria’s security forces have fallen short in three major ways. They have: 1) failed to protect vulnerable communities from violence; 2) failed to prevent collateral damage during counter-Boko Haram operations; and 3) directly targeted civilians with unlawful detention, harassment, destruction of property, sexual violence, indiscriminate targeting of certain groups (e.g. young men), torture, and excessive use of force causing injury and death.

Indeed, the notion that “all people in a particular area are *on the other side*” (Nagarajan, 2017) or “when we can’t see the enemy, civilians become the enemy” (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015) which is common among military personnel has been demonstrated in many of their operations in conflict areas and this has grave consequences when it comes to levels of civilian harm, especially where local civilians are caught in the middle (Dalton, 2020). Nigerian security forces’ approach to civilian protection as an objective in conflict management is often faulty given the fact that “civilians have been killed, and others face sexual exploitation and abuse, unlawful detention, restrictions on freedom of movement and family separation” (Dalton, 2020). For instance, civilian harm occasioned by the security forces deployed in the north-central region of the country to combat banditry and ethno-religious crises has been a recurring decimal. Soldiers, according to Musa (2019), engage in corruption and extortion, especially at military checkpoints while they often intimidate and coerce civilians. In the case of the Niger Delta crisis, numerous incidents of civilian casualties were recorded (Oluyemi, 2020) in the Nigerian military offensive. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) once accused soldiers from the military cantonment at Ohafia, Abia State, of swooping on its women during a meeting at Abiriba, brutalizing and stripping some of them naked (Eboh, 2017).

Nigeria’s fight against Boko Haram in the northeast also offers a fresh perspective on how lethal it has been, especially for civilians where they “have borne roughly 45 percent of conflict-related deaths” (Campbell and Harwood, 2018) largely owing to lack of clear policies to protect

civilians, lack of professionalism and accountability, poor community relations and communications, poor intelligence and information collection, which “negatively impact the ability of security forces to distinguish between civilians and militants” (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2015), among other factors. As reported by Amnesty International (2020), in response to an escalation in attacks by Boko Haram in Borno State, the Nigerian military has burned and forcibly displaced entire villages. It had, in the past, resorted to unlawful tactics that have had a devastating effect on civilians in the northeastern Borno and Yobe states. In 2017, a Nigerian Air Force fighter jet on a mission against Boko Haram extremists mistakenly²⁶ bombed a camp for displaced people in northeast Rann, near the border with Cameroon, in what the military referred to as its final push against the sect (BBC News, 2017), killing more than 100 refugees and wounding aid workers (NBC News, 2017). This explains the direct impact.

Today, the intangible aspect of such impacts is that the civil populace appears not to trust state security institutions to protect them in many conflict zones as the negative effects of military exercises and operations on the civilian populace, which are now more apparent and visible to citizens, continue to dominate public discourse mainly in the last two decades of civil rule in the country. Given the fact that prioritizing civilian protection in past and current military operations has been elusive, military deployment to conflict spots in the country is often received by the civilian populace with mixed feelings and approaches employed have largely remained incoherent, indecisive and unproductive in some cases. Shively & Perl (2017) contend that such deployment increases the risk of exposure to trauma by community members who are unfairly and indiscriminately targeted. With the aforementioned civilian harm, the validity of this submission is not in doubt. It suffices to say that the military must commence confidence building and assume the responsibility to protect civilians with a view to winning the support of the civil populace when peculiar realities warrant their deployment to take the lead on internal security.

Military visibility and democracy in Nigeria

A number of studies have explained the reasons for the high level of violence since the return of democracy in Nigeria. Wale Adebani (2004) has located the problem in freedom associated

²⁶ This is believed to be the first time Nigeria's military has admitted to making such a mistake.

with democracy, which gave way to violent expression of dissent, something that was hitherto suppressed under military rule. Other scholars have identified youth unemployment, elite manipulation, elections, boundary disputes, religion, corruption, lack of infrastructure, ethnicity and the growing culture of get-rich-quick syndrome pervading the Nigerian youth. These problems have triggered unrest in almost all parts of the country. The police institution is the traditional custodian of crime control in a democratic society. However, this all-important institution is grossly incapable of handling the crime situation. Studies have identified poor or inadequate training, lack of motivation, corruption and poor equipment as the general problems preventing the police from doing their jobs. Added to the challenge is the growing complexity of crimes in contemporary Nigeria.

Specifically, the security challenges facing the country have witnessed real changes, which proved difficult for the police to handle. Contemporary crimes tend to be well-organized and the criminals are more audacious than they used to be. In addition, there is the proliferation of more arms in the hands of undesirable elements and the criminals show more sophistication in planning their acts of violence, as well as handling these weapons. More worrisome is the fact that the country is challenged with a lack of adequate manpower in its security agencies, especially the Police, necessitating collaboration and synergy among the security actors. It suffices to say that the Police, in the face of poor equipment and training, are easily overwhelmed. For example, in the war against Boko Haram insurgents, the police proved incapable of handling the situation, which led to the drafting of federal troops in the region in 2009. The argument here is that the police are overwhelmed by the nature and intensity of security challenges in the country. Added to this is the lack of modern gadgets for modern policing. No doubt, the quality of training and welfare, logistics surveillance and intelligence gathering made available to the police personnel has a significant impact on their performance. It suffices to say that modern crime-fighting relies more on intelligence and technology. The military seems to be better placed in this regard, hence the need to incorporate them; though not without serious implications for the polity as observed by Oshita et al, (2019:667):

The use of the coercive instruments and institutions of the state to manage internal security challenges has been the most preferred option by successive Nigerian governments. The persistence of security challenges, coupled with the inability of both the formal and informal security institutions to contain them, has occasioned a huge loss of lives and property in Nigeria.

Specifically, the effects of military operations in a democratic Nigeria could be far-reaching. At the psychological level, seeing military boots around civilians is a reminder of the old days of the military which was characterized by dictatorship, flagrant disregard for fundamental human rights and general despair. Thus, the hope of democracy sending the military to the barracks has yet to materialize. It then shows that the democratic order is still fledging. In another instance, the usage of the military for what is supposed to be police duties is an indictment on the Nigerian state that has not been able to build a Police force that will be able to sustain a democratic society. It is argued that the lack of sustainable democracy and good governance contributes to risks of violent conflicts, bearing in mind too that one of the major opposite conditions for the consolidation of democracy is a successful institutionalization of civilian control of the military (Croissant and Kuehn, 2009). To the extent that the military has to be constantly called upon to quell civil unrest and criminalities is also an admittance of the superiority of the military over the police in a democratic society. In addition, as observed by Adefisoye and Ariyo (2019), the frequent usage of the military for internal security operations in a democratic era may make the military institution too powerful, and thus could lead to regime change through coups.

The concerns of Adefisoye and Ariyo are not without basis given the historical antecedents in Nigeria, even though military rule has become unfashionable in the contemporary world. The first and second republics were truncated by the military on the excuse of the inability of the political class to manage internal crises confronting the country. That is, the coup plotters had rationalized their actions on serious internal problems that they claimed were affecting the country. In the first republic, the problem was restricted to the western region. In the second republic, unrests were recorded in Oyo and Ekiti states over election results. The levels of crises were not as much as this, and the military was not even drafted out as much as in this period. However, it must also be noted that most of the military operations are joint task forces involving all the various security branches including the police, department of State Services, immigration, civil defense corps, customs service and NDLEA. In essence, the armed forces seldom operate alone.

Ironically, an ugly trend arising from such joint operations, as witnessed in the last decades, are clashes among these law enforcement agencies. Thus, apart from the challenge of “high handedness and insensitivity to the nature and characteristics of civilian dominated areas” (Dode, 2012:411), it becomes worrisome the level of open confrontation among the rank and file who are locked up in multidimensional inter-agency rivalry and bloody clashes where security operatives are caught in the web of violent conflicts to which they are deployed to curb. It is reflected in Police/Military, Police/Nigerian Navy, Police/Civil Defence Corps, Police/Nigerian Customs Service, and Military/Civil Defence Corps clashes. Given the level of casualties and the frequency of occurrence, however, the army-police clashes have been the most prominent. These repeated violent clashes, rather than the required inter-agency synergy, have further caused a loss of confidence and respect of the citizenry.

Conclusion

This study evaluates the presence of the military in internal security in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999. It contends that the military has been very visible, with operations in virtually all the states of the federation. Instances of visibility were given in each of the geopolitical zones. The study identifies the reasons for the involvement of the military in internal security in the incapability of the police to confront the growing security challenges. Reasons for the incapacitation of the police in doing their job were given, chief of which is the growing complexity of modern-day criminal activities. It was obvious that the police were overwhelmed by the enormity of the violence in different parts of the country.

The study further argues that the visibility of the military in the democratic space has some psychological effects on society, with particular reference to collateral damage among the civil populace. However, the study submits that within the context of Nigeria, military involvement in security operations works to safeguard democracy, and not to subvert it. Without the support of the military institution, the security challenges would have probably led to the collapse of the country. The ultimate solution to the problem of military visibility in Nigerian democratic space is for the police to be better-equipped, well-trained and well-motivated for their traditional role of securing the society. Until this is done, and the security situation remains, the military will

continue to be drafted from their barracks to the civil populace. Finally, even while conflict is inevitable in human society, we subscribe to a widely agreed proposition that the best strategy is to seek to address those conflict-enabled factors with a view to preventing violent conflicts before they break out in any way. Needless to say, a more comprehensive and contemporary mastery of the appropriate conflict processes and contexts, embracing in an all-inclusive form various actors and areas of security, is a prerequisite to effective strategies for conflict prevention and management.

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