

Inter-Agency Grudge among the Uniforms in the post-independence Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the reasons for inter-agency grudge among the uniforms in Nigeria with particular reference to the Nigerian police-military clashes in post-independence Nigeria. This rivalry is neither healthy for the nation nor good for the citizens most especially with so many security challenges hanging in the air begging for solutions. What is the relationship between the Nigerian police and the military? What are the reasons for these rivalries? What are the possible solutions to these grudges? To provide answers to these and other questions, the study adopted both descriptive and narrative methods with information derived from both primary and secondary sources. Findings from this study would provide possible solutions to this problem or open new areas for research in this area.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with a population of about 200 million people with over 500 ethnic groups with Christianity, Islam and the traditional religion as the key religious groups in the country.¹The country has witnessed a civil war lasting for over 30 months, ethnic clashes which has led to the destruction of lives and properties, kidnapping and armed robberies are on the increase with a rising level of sophistication. The Niger-Delta militants at a point in time had almost held the economy of the country at a standstill through its aggressive destruction of pipelines while the dreaded Boko Haram sect is out in the North-East wreaking havoc on the lives and properties of citizens. The police and other security agencies by training and constitution are expected to conduct themselves in ways that could promote or project the image and dignity of the country they serve and by extension, pay absolute allegiance to the constitution of the country they serve. However, this total loyalty and allegiance is lacking as this is noticed or witnessed in the breach rather than its observance as a result of synergy grudge among the

security agencies in the country resulting to violence in most cases. This has been aptly captured in Odoma Samuel²; In the same vein, Oke, Oloruntimehin and Akinola posits that, the police exist to prevent and or reduce crimes in society. They are further saddled with the right to protect the citizenry from harm and violations. Hence, they are seen as indispensable formal agency of social control.³

The Military of Nigeria is made up of the Army, Navy and the Air force. They on the other hand, are saddled with the task of protecting and defending the nation against external aggression both on land, sea and the air. They are also expected to work in collaboration with the civil police in providing internal security even though there are a lot of differences by nature of their training and with the security challenges going on in the different parts of the country, one would expect that, these key agencies would work together to defeat the menace bedeviling the society. On the contrary, these agencies are more often found fighting among themselves. What are the key reasons behind the synergy grudge between the police-military in Nigeria if one may ask? Synergy grudge or Intra rivalry among agency has been defined as;

a state of competition, contention, or emulation within and between Services for something of perceived value to the contending interests. It could be tangible or intangible recognition and other perceived “benefits to self-esteem”. It can be positive (good natured) or negative (associated with deleterious consequences such as the inability to cooperate optimally in support of National Defence and Security objectives). When it occurs between Services, it is described as “Inter-Service” rivalry e.g. between the Army and Navy, Army and Air Force, or Navy and Air Force. Rivalry may also exist between Military services (singly or jointly) and the Police or other internal security agencies. When it occurs within a Service, it is known as “Intra-Service” rivalry.⁴ In order to understand why there may be intra agency grudge between the police force and the military, or even among the military itself,⁴

Omoigui suggested that one has to look at each of the etiquette, customs, ceremonies, and traditions which breed a common set of core values. This point has been expressed by Mack and Connell in Omoigui, where they observed that; traditions, ceremonies, customs, and usage exert a profound influence upon human behavior. This effect is particularly marked in such professions as the Military organizations which – because of imposed discipline – lend themselves to passing on and perpetuating the more venerated customs, heroic traditions, and dignified ceremonies. Such stimuli when appreciated and properly applied engender ideals and *service esprit de corps* of incalculable value.⁵

The concoction of tradition, courage and pride creates an exclusive identity and code of conduct and ethics which feeds *Service esprit de corps* (also referred to as the “spiritual cement” of a Military unit or service.) ...When there are no shared values, based on joint etiquettes, customs, ceremonies, traditions and operational doctrines, servicemen and women intuitively default to their respective

parochial services. This can lead to wasteful duplication and undermine national security. Several incidents of “friendly fire” in war have been attributed to this phenomenon⁶

Intra-agency grudge or rivalry is as old as the history of the various security agencies worldwide. For example, in the United Kingdom as far back as 1870 where the tradition was that all military decisions most especially involving war were to be undertaken by elected politicians while the Military command was to offer advice. Omoigui posits that, The 1870 War Office Act divided responsibility in the War Office among the Commander-in-Chief, the Surveyor General of Ordnance, and the civilian Financial Secretary.... The Secretary of State for War was made Chairman of a combined civilian and military army council which then reported to a Committee of Imperial Defence under the Prime Minister,... Expectedly, Service rivalry between the rapidly growing RAF (whose bomber program was favored), and its older services, namely the Royal Navy and British Army, worsened under conditions of limited budgets.⁷

In Nigeria, Intra-Service Rivalry has also existed among the military itself. Such rivalries had existed between individuals, combat corps i.e the Infantry, Armour, Artillery, etc. Omoigui maintained that “Sometimes, such special regiments have been viewed with envy or suspicion by their fellow units for one reason or another, usually because they are felt to be pampered or that officers and men within them have a “chip on their shoulders.” Intra-agency rivalry in Nigeria among the military itself is believed to have been witnessed during the Nigerian civil war when rivalry between the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd divisions of the Army.⁸ Omoigui pointed out that; Rivalry took the form of inter-personal friction, envy, gloating at the failures of others, refusal to collaborate for joint operations, failure to communicate, competition for logistic stores, inappropriate showmanship, outright disregard of orders from Army HQ, etc. Many friendly fire incidents that were dismissed as being “accidental” can be traced to such rivalries and the lack of joint planning and coordination. Most importantly, lack of jointness has been held responsible for the long duration of the war, with its tragic consequences for the civilian population of then Biafra, including children.⁹

This rivalry continued into the seventies, eighties and nineties. A good example is where the Brigade of Guards under then Colonel (later Major General) JN Garba attracted mixed emotions from other Army infantry units. On the other hand, in the eighties and early nineties, the Armored Corps, following a spate of involvement in repeated coups d'état also attracted mixed emotions from other corps. Well known wartime clichés like “The combat arm of decision” soon became synonymous with successful coup plotting. At one point during the regime of the late General Abacha (who was an Infantry man), this resulted in a retaliatory series of deployments to border villages and an order to have their Tank tracks removed!”¹⁰

Another form of grudge outlined by Omoigui is believed may have developed on the basis of the type of officer commission. In Nigeria, for example, the coup attempt of February 1976 was at least in part driven by such rivalry between Short-service and Regular commissioned officers. It was as a result of some of these intra-agency rivalries in the late seventies that by 1976 the Nigerian Air Force on

its own sought for a more clearly defined way to delineate its identity from the Army by replacing Army ranks with traditional Air Force ranks and insignia.¹¹

Police- Military Relations in Nigeria

The relationship between the police and the Military has never been different even after independence, but became sour after the January 1966 coup. The first clash between the two agencies can be traced during this period. A good number of police officers who were carrying out their assigned duties had their lives cut short by trigger happy military officers engaged in the coup. The coup plotters made mention of corrupt politicians as their targets in this coup. Even though it was a known fact that the police were accused of so many wrong acts in the country, but they do not constitute a threat to the military; yet they were attacked and brutally killed. ... Ever since then, there has been silent clashes at beer joints or isolated areas between the two agencies. However, the most notable of this cold war erupted during the January 15, 1966 coup into physical clashes leading to the death of the following police officers namely PC Akpan Anduka, PC Hagai Lai, Philip lewande, PC Yohana Garkawa and Sergeant Daramola Oyegoke (assisted Nzeogwu in the attack on the Sardauna's lodge and according to the Police report was murdered by Nzeogwu)¹²

Omoigui however maintained that "circa 1976, however, there was a major clash in Port-Harcourt when then Lt. Col. Sani Abacha was in command of the infantry brigade based in that city."¹³ This fact has also been collaborated by Odoma, since then, findings have revealed that inter agency grudge is on the increase at an alarming rate. In a research conducted, "... some active duty Military and Police leaders claim current rivalries are only a problem at lower ranks. Retired Police officers – who tend to speak more freely - have blamed the long period of Military rule and institutional subordination of the Police to second class status. Some Military officers have blamed tensions on "Police inferiority complex" while others have argued that it is a "superiority complex" encouraged by the advent of civil rule and the withdrawal of soldiers to the barracks. Some newspapers allege, on the other hand, that certain "benefits" enjoyed by servicemen in uniform (such as free public transportation) since the civil war are to blame.¹⁴

There have been clashes between members of the Nigerian Police force and the Army, Police Force and the Navy, Air force, clashes between Nigerian Police and Civil Defence Corps, Nigerian Police and the Nigerian Customs. These conflicts have led to the destruction of lives and properties of both the various security agencies involved in the fight and the civil societies they are meant to protect.

Causes of Police- Military Grudges in Nigeria

So many factors or reasons have been put forward or advanced as to the reasons behind the police - military grudges. Reputable among the causes of these clashes has to do with the claims of who is superior to the other. During colonial rule and even immediately after independence, members of the police force were better taken care of and accorded due recognition in the society more than members of the military. 'Army Barracks were worse than Police barracks and policemen were

better paid. Soldiers were often derided in public, particularly in the Western region where they were even called epithets like “Afamaco” or “Abobaku” - a preview, one might add, to the epithet “zombie”, which was popularized by Fela Anikulapo Kuti in the late seventies.¹⁵

According to the Police Act, Cap F19 of the laws of Nigeria in section 4, states that;

The Police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged and shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other Act.¹⁶

The above powers of the police to arrest did not exclude the arrest of military officers. In fact, section 99 of the Armed Forces Act 1993 as amended in line with the 1999 constitution made it a punishable offence to obstruct police officers from arresting a service person. According to this Act.

A person subject to service law under this Act who at any place either within or outside Nigeria prevents or obstructs-

- (a) the execution by a police officer of a warrant for the arrest of a person subject to service law under this Act who has committed or is suspected of having committed an offence punishable on conviction by a civil court; or
- (b) the arrest of a person subject to service law under this Act by a police officer acting in the exercise of his powers of arrest without warrant,

is guilty of an offence under this section and liable, on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or any less punishment provided by this Act.”¹⁷

The above acts simply points to the fact that, Nigerian Military personnel are both subject to military and civil rules especially during a democratic dispensation. Corroborating more on this fact is Brigadier Gen. T.E.C. Chiefe (Rtd), in his book *Military law in Nigeria under Democratic Rule*. He posits that;

the Police can enforce the law on every citizen of Nigeria including the military. Consequently, it has the authority to enter any military location to effect an arrest or search premises. In practice, however, for security reasons, the police do so through the cooperation and liaison with the military high command. This reduces friction between the police and the military, yet, it achieves the desired results.¹⁸

If this is the case, then why are members of the police force and the military always fighting each other with members of the military in most cases either beating

or destroying police stations or even lives? What has both the senior officers of the police and the military done to ensure that these rules contained in the Acts are strictly enforced and perpetrators punished? Is it that the superior military or Police officer are indirectly giving a nod to some of the reckless behavior of some of its men? These and many more are the questions begging for answers.

Interestingly, even during the first republic, police roles were clearly spelt out, however, shortly after the success of the January 1966 and later the July 1966 second coups, the military decided to suspend the constitution; in its place introduced various decrees which had placed the military in performing those functions or roles ordinarily controlled by the police. For more than thirty-five years, the military was at the head of the administration of the country and as such developed a bossy orientation or superiority complex against other security agencies with particular reference to the members of the police force. This fact is corroborated by Dr. Nowa A. Omoigui a guest lecturer at the National War College Course 14; He posits that,

Soldiers controlled everything everywhere: education, health, politics, university admission, government contracts and all sorts. The military suspended the constitution to enjoy absolute dictatorial powers and unlimited privileges. Nigeria was a colony of military generals administered by the rank and file in the military (Greene 1997, CDHR 1999).’ However, after a lot of agitations from different civil organizations from within and outside the country, the military finally handed over power to a democratically elected government in 1999... ‘...and, as no respecter of either person or institution, the law has to be enforced even on soldiers who have superior fire power and have *dictatorially* controlled politics until 1999. But soldiers are still everywhere in the country: in politics and trade; on streets, in commercial buses and general stores; and, from their actions and inactions, they largely consider unimaginable, probably abominable, a polity where they, as the ‘boss’ for many years, will accept to be controlled by highhanded, “bloody civilian” Nigerian policemen who enforce the law. ¹⁹

In terms of superiority claims, pundits are of the views that, military officers are guiltier of this act. They argued that, serving military officers find it difficult to take orders from ‘bloody civilians’ even when such civilians were previously members of the military service. This fact clearly played out in 2015 after General Muhammadu Buhari had appointed Brig-Gen. Monsur Dan-Ali (rtd) as the Minister of Defence. The fear among most senior military officers in the country was the fact that, Gen. Ali until his retirement, was three years junior to the then current service chiefs, and since he is their junior in military hierarchy and order of seniority, they wondered why the chiefs would take orders from him or refer to him as sir.²⁰ It is based on similar actions that, Femi Falana an erudite lawyer pointed out to the fact that this ‘ incident has brought to the fore the refusal of the military establishment to subject itself to civil authorities under a democratic

dispensation...²¹ It is this bossy orientation or superiority complex by the military that has made it difficult for them to realize their real status under a civil regime, hence their clashes with the police.

Another cause of intra agency grudge between the police and military is in the form of training. During enlistment, enlistees are made to believe that their uniforms, training's and nature of work are superior to that of other services. This has been aptly collaborated by Omoigui thus;

There is a majority consensus that during induction, enlistees are formally oriented to believe that service in the Military or Police is superior to any other kind of service to the country. They are also formally oriented on what their uniforms mean and why they need to be proud to wear it, rather than the uniform of any other service. Each service (Military and Police) maintains different mottos, service badges of rank and medals, service etiquettes and uniforms.²²

According to some junior ranking police officers interviewed randomly, they alleged that members of the police force during enlistment find themselves training under unfavorable or inhuman conditions by nature of their feedings, accommodation and kitting. This point has also been expressed by Sankara. In the words of Sankara;

Men and women of the Nigerian police, many of whom have to pay their way to join the police, trained under one of the most inhuman conditions imaginable, as attested to by the state of the police colleges and after training, buy their own uniform, boots, writing materials, torchlight and all other working tools. It would amount to asking too much to expect anything less than their bestial treatment of ordinary Nigerians. Added to the above is the fact that they have to go on for upward of four to six months before they can earn their first monthly salary, which amounts to nothing at the end of the day.²³

From north to west, east to south, the conditions police recruits go through is not different. These officers apart from living and undergoing training under such inhuman conditions, have to pay for their uniforms, boots, torch light, writing material etc., during training and after their posting. On completion of their trainings and subsequent postings, their salaries are not paid to them immediately until after three or four months. Bashir in Odoma Samuel pointed out on the importance of motivation and welfare of workers. He posits that;

It is universally accepted that the strongest motivation in any place of work is proper care or the welfare of the workers. To fail to take good care of worker's well-being is to create a sense of alienation in them. This undoubtedly will have adverse effect on their performance.²⁴

With their welfare ignored right from the police colleges, they are already aggrieved looking for whom to vent their anger. Meanwhile, they police officers see their counterparts in the military 'well taken care of' during training and even after training in the area of welfare and other logistics such as transportation, prompt payment of allowances after passing out from the military depot and accommodation in most cases provided in the barracks. This has made a good number of police officers wanting to swap positions if possible with the army.

To make matters worse, they see the society accord more respect, honor and obedience to military officers than they who are always out their working even at the grass root with the populace. As if that is not enough, according to another source, they are challenged for doing their jobs by the same military guys who, in most cases are in the offensive. The desire and determination to prove to the society that they too, are important and can withstand any force be it military, usually end up in members of the police force venting out the already bottled up annoyance on the civilians and by extension the military at the slightest provocation leading to clashes. To buttress this point, Prive S. Torulagha maintained thus:

A military or a police force made up of angry soldiers or police men and women is a very dangerous force indeed. There is no doubt that most members of the armed and police forces are not happy with their situation. They are poorly paid and the benefits are very insignificant. On the other hand, the senior officers live relatively well. Add to that is the ability of the senior officers to embezzle. The NCOs do not have the opportunity to embezzle because they are not in decision-making positions. This creates anger since the officers can buy fleets of cars, build mansions, and send their children overseas for education while the NCOs cannot do so... They also try to pay society back for their poor treatment during security operations by destroying everything on their path or looting as much as possible.²⁵

Pundits On the other hand are of the opinion that, envy may be the key reason for these clashes. They assert that, after democracy has been restored in the country, it is obvious that the police are brought closer to the corridors of power more than the military. Police men are appointed as orderlies to chairmen of local governments, guards to state governors, their convoys and other politicians in the country with some juicy financial benefits. As if that is not enough to provoke the military, they see their counterparts in the police force collecting bribe from citizens which they (police) end up more favorably competing with them or even snatching their girlfriends at beer joints, buying and doing things with money which ordinarily their salaries could not have given them. This ends up in deliberate efforts by military officers to prove to the police that, though the police may be more favored, they are the 'men', this probably explains why a soldier even when on mufti when confronted by the police rather than identify themselves to the

police prefer to argue or exchange abusive words which in most cases usually end up in physical combats.

Though some of the military officers interviewed seemed to debunk such claims, they however, maintained that, soldiers are meant to take care of the external defence of the country while the police are responsible for internal security. Their annoyance is based on the fact that, they are now forced to do police duties and may be required to do same during external territorial attack on the nation.

Yet another cause of clashes between the police and the military is due to the high handedness of police officers in executing the law. Observers point out to the fact that, our police officers lack courtesy and professionalism in their dealings with people especially the poor civilians who do not even know their rights or who to turn to for help. Some of these military officers have relatives or seen helpless people who have been brutally dealt with by some police officers. Some of them had even suffered under some police men and as such desire to take revenge for any humiliation suffered by themselves, an individual or colleagues in the hands of the rival services. They wait patiently for an opportunity when they could pay back the police in their own coin. This opportunity usually present itself when one of the members of the services commits an offence, the police would take it up by mishandling the military officers the way they usually brutally handle civilians. At times the military officer could even be in mufti and try to identify themselves but such police officers would want to prove that this was their terrain which in most cases usually resort to exchange of abusive words and fight where a member of the service may be manhandled. In order to maintain the honor of its organizations, such services usually go out to take revenge. Collaborating this point Odoma held that;

Sometimes it is a desire to “avenge” perceived dishonour suffered at the hands of the police. Another potential for crisis is when the police engage in hot pursuit of suspects who for one reason or another then take refuge inside military barracks.²⁶

When soldiers or police officers due to the harsh economic situation in the country, chose to use their free time for something that would legitimately improve their economic status, they should be commended as this may add up to some financial inadequacies. However, be that as it may, they should be disciplined to obey the rules and regulations of the game and comply with the lead down rules as contained in the constitution by obtaining all the necessary documents required before plying such roads so as to avoid what most soldiers ‘termed embarrassment by the police’

An undisciplined officer is known for breaking the laws he is meant to protect or defend and yet does not want to be challenged. Once challenged, he reasons within himself that, if he accepts his faults, he would be termed or regarded as a weakling. To avoid been called or regarded a weakling, he must fight tooth and nail if possible enlist the support of members of his or her family to maintain their high image. It is worthy to note that, the police by nature of their job until the

establishment of the Federal road Safety Corps, was among other duties, to ensure safety on all the roads. As such the police had to demand for car particulars and driving licenses from all citizens with military officers inclusive. It is in the cause of performing such duties that pundits observed, usually pitch them against the members of the society. This view has been collaborated by Odoma thus;

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 hosts from bribe seeking policemen.²⁷

Suggested Solution on Police Military Clashes in Nigeria

Many efforts have been devised to avert or curtail the clashes between the various security agencies in Nigeria such as joint patrols, inter-sports competition and other activities aimed at promoting unity. However, this has not always been successfully achieved.

To minimize conflicts among the Nigerian Police and Military officers, it would not be out of place if senior officers in both the police and military are all committed in promoting unity. This is because from all indications, it seems the senior officers from both sides are not serious in promoting unity, if they do, most of these clashes would not have been occurring. This is because, both the police and military services have strict discipline polices put in place to punish erring officers, as such, it is easier to put their men in check by enforcing such disciplinary measures.

That notwithstanding, both policemen and military men must be disciplined either on duty, on mufti or in uniform by first obeying the laws of the land at all times. They can do this by respecting each other and also in *esprit de corps* by explaining in polite terms, identifying who they are and their lapses when they err. The police officer on duty whether satisfied with the excuse given or not, should be professional in his/ her approach. Where such a police officer is not satisfied with the explanation given, he/ she should not quarrel, fight or manhandle the military officer in question, as this would attract sympathy from such an officer(s) colleagues. The police officer(s) should get the details about the officer in their custody, nature of offence, place of offence and time committed and forward it to the commanding officer of the offending military officer or send it to the nearest military unit closet to the police post or command as soon as possible. They can do this through phone calls, radio messages or sending a delegation to the nearest military unit to report.

The police should also be trained to manage the psychology of the military and ensure that every police out post, station, division, area command, command and zone know the lanyard of every military corps and also have access to phone numbers of the nearest military units across the country. This will go a long way in easing tension and conflict.

Another way of averting conflicts between the police and the military in Nigeria is that, the police as an institution should train and retrain its officers on the need for professionalism, hard work, discipline and to shun corrupt practices. This would go a long way in building confidence and trust by the public and society at large on the police. This would also boost the image of the police before their contemporaries in other security services and as such, end the perceived hatred and distrust on the police by other national sister security agencies in the country, thus reducing conflict.

Yet according to another study which claimed that, ‘‘Perhaps, the occasional violent clashes of the police and the military may be attributed chiefly to the deliberate low level of cooperation and liaison between the two security agencies in locations where such clashes occur. This view is reinforced by the fact that, where cooperation and liaison exist, soldiers and policemen at the lower level who often cause clashes would be mindful of the fact that their superiors would not take kindly to any clashes. It is also expected that in the case of disagreements in the course of duty, soldiers and policemen would report to their respective superiors who would in the spirit of cooperation and liaison iron out the differences without rancor.

As for the military, it is most appropriate, to develop a strategy or curriculum (where none exist) in all its institutions or training units to teach its personnel with strong emphasis on the powers of the police over the military, in a democracy. This aspect of military education will reduce and possibly eliminate violent clashes between the police and soldiers. The police can also through continuous education of its own personnel, on the need to be as civil as possible to all persons including soldiers, to reduce or avoid the creation of an environment which would be conducive for clashes between the police and the soldiers.

However, from available events involving the two security agencies noticed, it is evidently clear that the message of the military on the need for military men and women to be subject to both military and civil rule seemed not to be well preached. This is because; both the soldiers and police officers tend to do the contrary of what is expected of them. The idea of ‘the man or woman in uniform is superior to a law-abiding civilian’ should be discouraged by all security agencies in Nigeria as they are all guilty of this act. They should be trained and re-trained on the need to be firm and focused while performing their duties but at the same time, accord the citizens their due respect. Once civilians are respected, the various agencies would respect one another.

Observers are of the opinion that, another important point that could reduce these frictions is joint training in some related courses and sporting activities between the police and the military. They maintained this would go a long way in building ties between members of the two forces. However, others interviewed are quick to point out that, these frictions are carried out even during sporting activities between the two agencies.

In law, for every violation or offence committed, there is a punishment attached to it. As such, no officer should be spared no matter his connections if he goes against any of the laws of the land. The trial or punishment carried out on such

erring culprits should be made known to its colleagues and general public if possible. Both the police and the military should be sincere to one another and avoid the untrue stories of ‘unidentified officer(s)’ they are found to voice out, so as to defend their own. This would go a long way in sending a strong message that both agencies meant business. On the other hand, those government officials or politicians holding public offices but choose to protect or encourage these acts of indiscipline, by protecting such people should if possible, be refused when they place such demands and be exposed. This can however, only be achieved if the agencies are empowered to be independent in their sources of operations, finances, promotion or appointments.

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