

## **Analyzing the Evolution of Private Security Guards and their Limitations to Security Management in Nigeria**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

*The origin of the proliferation of private security companies (guards) in Nigeria can be traced to the systemic failure and inefficiency that adorn the public security sector, which exhibits blatant inability to meet the security needs of the people resulting from her agelong anti-people posture, inadequate training, official corruption, nepotism among other negativities. Indeed, the complementary roles being played by private security guards in mitigating the security challenges confronting the nation have been seen by many as a welcome development. In spite of the successes recorded, yet there exist some obstacles that undermine private security guards' operations in Nigeria. In meeting the objectives of this study, the article conceptualises private security guards within the context of Nigerian experience. It goes further to analyse the historical development of private security guards in Nigeria, their prospects, challenges and ways through which their operations can be improved.*

### **Introduction**

There seems no contention regarding the strategic relevance that security holds in the development of any nation. Certainly, security of lives and property remains paramount to the evolution of state. This view finds its inspiration in the intellectual conception of Thomas Hobbes through his work on social contract painting a gory picture of the affairs of men in the state of nature where there was manifestly an absence of government to regulate relationships among men. The ruthless and disorderly nature of the Hobessian state compelled people to rise in unison and decide to surrender their individual powers to a central authority from whom they believed that their security and wellbeing could be actualised. Security can simply be defined as “freedom from danger, that is, protection from physical or direct violence, and freedom from fear, that is, a sense of safety and relative well-being in political, legal, socio-economic and cultural terms, that is, a measure of protection from structural violence” (Wairagu, Kamenju and Singo, 2004: 16). Undoubtedly, the issue of security remains important to the continued socio-economic survival of any people (Hyden, 1995). It is for this reason that there have been different efforts by stakeholders especially governments to develop frameworks to advance security of their people and develop strategies to mitigate the risks that both human and non-human threats can pose to the wellbeing of the people. One of such

efforts in human history was the conception of the modern state crafted to enjoy all sorts of privileges and rights such as civil obedience as it is also expected to reciprocate such civil gestures of the people by providing them some protection against various kinds of internal or external threats (Tilly, 1987). The issue of security management has nevertheless experienced a shift from its traditional conception as an exclusive function of government (Hobbes, 1962) to a more accommodating security sector that encourages participation of private security organizations and citizens in security planning and practice.

In this paper, we shall be addressing the development and challenges of private security guards in Nigeria. In our attempt to achieve the overall aim of this paper, we shall begin the study by illuminating the conceptual meaning of private security guards with a view to address the problem of misconceptions and misapprehension about private security guards. The paper shall explain the development of private security guards in Nigeria. The study shall also encapsulate some of the problems or challenges arising from the activities of private security guards in the country. In the study, we shall make recommendations in addressing some of the challenges confronting private security guards in Nigeria.

### **Conceptualizing Private Security Guards in Nigeria**

The use of private security guards is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. In traditional African society, many rich people in various communities often hired the services of private guards in ensuring the security of their lives and property. At the time of colonial administration, the use of private security guards failed to disappear as many local elites were still found seeking the services of indigenous security guards for their security needs but virtually all the local guards were contracted from private security companies that were not only unregistered but also lacked any clear-cut lines of operation. In defining 'private security guard' or who a private security guard is, many misconceptions are usually committed especially as it relates to failure to draw a demarcation between association and occupation. For instance, in traditional African society, the services of powerful and brave hunters could be sought by any people or communities despite the fact that their main occupation was hunting.

It is against this background that in this study, we shall be defining private security guards within the context of association and occupation, .i.e. someone not commissioned as a public guard providing various security services but employed by either a registered or unregistered private security outfit. In the history of private security guards in Nigeria, many households or neighborhoods were fond of employing the services of 'mai-guards' as watchmen (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005), and at that time, there was no private security company in the country. However, the first private security company with uniformed guards in the country, Nigeria Investigation and Security Company (NISCO) emerged in 1965 and it is still in existence till date (ibid). Owing to this historical fact,

one cannot but agree that it was existence of private security guards that laid foundation for private security companies in Nigeria and in several other African countries.

However, there are two basic types of private security companies, and they include registered or unregistered private security companies. The implication of this, is that not all private guards are recruited by registered companies. Private security companies carryout the recruitment of the people who will turn out as guards through formal and informal channels. Most times, informal channels of recruitment are explored by unregistered private security companies like friend's invitation, primordial relation, parental induction, among others. The emergence of ethnic militias like O'dua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and the Bakassi Boys and their provision of private security services in Nigeria has further increased the importance of informal channels in the recruitment of guards in private security sector. These organizations usually draw their guards among their members who are of the same ethnic nationalities.

The emergence of these ethnic militias in private security sector was as a result of growing need by the people to unearth an alternative security arrangement which could help to mitigate the threats emanating from growing crime in their neighborhoods and Nigeria in general. These militia guards are often found in the south western Nigeria and south eastern region of the country. Largely, they recruit guards for private security services by association rather than occupation. These guards, to a large extent, have no formal training but their relevance is enhanced through the spiritual powers they possess such that they can face any armed criminals without fear.

As it were, recruitment of guards by ethnic militias does not usually have age restriction and very little or no attention is given to the level of formal education possessed by the recruits. These recruits offer private security services voluntarily unlike guards commissioned by registered security companies but all the members are often invited if the group or its interest is being challenged by any another group, faction or government (and/or its security agents) . The reason is that they render such services by association not occupation, as many of them have their individual occupations, and they may offer private security services on part time basis or not at all. They are always adorned with all sorts of charms and few of them use dangerous weapons like guns unlike guards recruited by registered private security companies, and their female members are hardly recruited to provide private security services.

On the other hand, registered private security companies often recruit their guards by advertising in the media especially through the daily newspapers. The recruits come from all segments of Nigerian society irrespective of tribal or ethnic groups. Most of these recruits are usually between the ages of twenty and forty-five depending on the positions being advertised as vacant as there is no sex restriction in the recruitment of people as guards. Meanwhile, there is no study that has shown the gender composition of the guards but there are more male guards than the female. Indeed, none of the various studies concerning private security guards in Nigeria has significantly illuminated the types of responsibilities accorded to each sex. Again in registered private security

organizations, level of education and years of experience to a large extent determine allocation of positions among the guards.

Indeed, the kinds of service being rendered by private security guards depend largely on the laws of each country. There are some countries like Afghanistan where private guards are allowed to carry weapons like guns while in some other countries like Nigeria, private security guards are not permitted by the law to equip themselves with weapons but they carry sjamboks, buttons and knob-sticks. Whether the relevant laws of any country allow private security guard to be armed or unarmed, services of private guards may be provided on local, national or international basis.

Generally, private guards perform not only functions of policing but some of them may also offer military tasks according to their line of duty. The experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown that there is growing presence of private security guards in military operations. There is a belief among some scholars that those private guards performing military tasks cannot be regarded as private security guards but private military guards. We contend in this paper that evidence has shown that most of the companies producing the guards that perform various military tasks, do not usually regard themselves as private military companies because they often express an opinion that their objective is to provide security needs of their clients and use weapons basically for defensive actions rather than offensive, which the military may be mandated to perform (see Bearpark & Schulz, 2007).

The conceptual demarcation between ‘defensive actions’ and ‘offensive actions’ distinguishes the private security guards that perform military functions from the mercenaries. Considering the foregoing, private security guards are expected to use force or weapon as a last resort and avoid engaging in the acts that can be considered as offensive in the discharge of their duties. Apart from security of lives and property of their clients, private security guards can also perform other functions including intelligence collection and analysis, patrolling, spying, riot control, among others.

### **Theoretical Insight**

It is a truism that a State of Africa is an artificial one, which has brought together different strangers with very little or no regard to differences in their socio-cultural backgrounds. To add salt onto injury, the colonisers also crafted African state in such a way that there is absence of any definite shared political culture among the people. The endemically weakening nature of political institutions has further undermined the capacity of African state to guarantee the security of its people. Most of the characteristics of insecurity that have pervaded most African countries are also evident in Nigeria.

Though, each country on the continent (Africa) exhibits peculiarity in the scope and level of insecurity being experienced but it is generally believed that inefficiency and ineptitude which hitherto dominate public security sector and the growing relevance being enjoyed by private security can be traced to the inept character of African state which is “symptomatic of state weakness and the failure of the state to provide physical security for its citizens through the establishment of functioning law-and-order institutions” (Holmqvist, 2005: 11). Several other scholars have stressed the point that Private Security Companies (PSCs) will grow where there is the establishment of parallel structures of power or authority (Reno, 1999).

Clapham contends that weak political culture and institutions in most African countries can be traced to both indigenous and colonial ‘projects of territorial statehood’ (Clapham 1999:27). There is no doubt that the Weberian philosophy of modern state is vastly lacking in Africa due to the failure of most governments on the continent to adequately monopolize the use of force for the purpose of actualizing and promoting the security of the people. One can blame the problem of insecurity that has pervaded Nigeria and the entire African continent largely on colonial experience. This is because the colonizers distorted the cultural practices of the people especially their security management initiatives and to a large extent the abrupt replacement of political practices of the local people with Western ones that can be considered not only alien to African people but also suppressive and counterproductive (see Onoge, 1993; Achebe, 1959).

In fact, the elimination of traditional approaches to security management in Africa was a deliberate attempt by the colonizers to create a security system that would only be subservient to their authority with no regard to the local people. This view is corroborated by Clapham (1999), arguing that:

*It was ... one of the key projects of colonial rule to ensure that security derived, and was seen to derive explicitly from the central state, and that any mechanism through which African communities might seek to maintain “their own” security was systematically destroyed or strictly subordinated to the colonial authorities (Clapham, 1999:25).*

Without a doubt, the processes of maintaining law and order by the public security sector during the colonial era was much different from the way tasks of managing security were being initiated and carried-out in Europe. For instance, there is a consensus among many scholars in history and criminology that colonizers designed African police to be an instrument of oppression against the local people with the aim of enjoying continued or unchecked domination over the colonized by the colonizers (Alemika, 1988; Ikime, 1977; Tamuno, 1970; Crowder 1978; Ahire, 1991; Onyeozili, 2005). In Nigeria, the demonizing posture of the police and the endemic hatred shown towards it by the local people was consequent on:

*the colonial objectives were (to varying degrees during the phases of colonialism in Nigeria) prosecuted through organized governmental violence, vandalism and plunder on the part of the colonizers...The sundry administrative, coercive and surveillance organs (police, prisons, courts, tribunals, "native" authorities, Residents and District Officers) were established to prosecute, promote, and defend British imperialistic interests in Nigeria (Alemika, 1988: 164).*

Definitely, the colonizers experienced legitimacy crisis across all African frontiers resulting from persistent opposition from the colonized against their rule, which in turn deepened the disconnection between the public security sector and the local people as the former was rapidly mobilized by colonizers as an oppressive force against the latter (people). Thus, the enemy-image that was created by colonialism between the police and the local people has no doubt offered an explanation on why public security sector till date often embarks on policies and actions that are anti-people and oppressive. This intellectual viewpoint is further illuminated by Onoge (1993: 178):

*The burden of colonial policing was the subordination of the national interests of the people to the political and economic interest of the state. Through armed patrols, raids, arrests and detention, the colonial police protected the colonial economy by policing labour. Through the enforcement of unpopular direct taxation, the raiding of labour camps, and the violent suppression of strikes, the police ensured the creation, supply and discipline of the proletarian labour force required by colonial capitalism ... The police, the most visible enforcer of colonial diktat remained immensely unpopular. The police, in the consciousness of the people, became the symbol of the dictatorial establishment rather than the protector of the people's rights. As the people had no checks over the arbitrariness of the police, they either avoided "police trouble" or mediated inevitable contacts with bribe offerings.*

The peculiar use of public security agencies especially police to witch-hunt, oppress, suppress and ruthlessly violate the citizens in satisfying the wishes and political domination of the colonizers has been imbibed by the ruling elite after the demise of colonial rule in Nigeria and many other postcolonial-Africa societies. This view is supported by Alemika (1988) who argues that the nationalists who were opposing the brutal and anti-people policies of the police during the colonial era, at independence continued to mobilize the police as an instrument of terror and violence with the aim of suppressing their opponents and people to consolidate their grip on the state power.

Certainly, the factors responsible for the lackadaisical and ineffective nature of the public security sector and the increasing need for private security activity in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa can be multifarious. In fact, these factors may include rapid reduction of armed forces in post-Cold War era, processes and conditions of globalization and market liberalization, the growing incidence of the proliferation of arms and light weapons, and unbearable atmosphere of insecurity (see Gumedze, 2007). Indeed, one cannot run away from the belief that all the foregoing causes are borne out of the adverse effects that colonialism has had on the capacity of Nigeria and several other postcolonial African societies to manage their internal security. The growing nationalist orientations and secessionist articulations of various ethnic nationalists, which are the remnants of colonialism, have continued to pose a huge threat to political sovereignty and security of Nigerian state. The contradictions produced by the colonial experience have remained a clog in the wheel of actualizing state building as patrimonialism has become order of the day. The public security sector has also been accused of taking patrimonial considerations and ethnic bias in the discharge of their duties. A good example is the public condemnation of the immediate past Inspector General of Police (IGP) and Niger State Commissioner of Police (CP), Mr. Hafiz Ringim and Zakari Biu respectively following the escape, from Police detention, of Mr. Kabir Umar (a.k.a. Kabir Sokoto), an alleged member of *Boko Haram* (a terrorist group in the northern part of Nigeria) and the prime suspect of the December 25, 2011 bombing at the St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madala, Niger State where more than one hundred people including the worshippers were killed.

In actual fact, many have regarded such escape as high profile sabotage by some police authorities who have allowed ethnic cum religious affections and corruption to undermine the ethics of their profession. The accused CP, Zakari Biu is from the same state of origin with the suspect which has aroused suspicion among the large segment of Nigerian society. Hence, several people are of the view that the escape of the suspect was a planned one by some high-ranked police officers including erstwhile IGP and Niger State CP to prevent the suspect from disclosing the sponsors of the terrorist group, *Borom Haram* with the motive of covering-up the involvement of some northern elites in the dastardly activities of the terrorist group. The mounting public uproar against Ringim and Biu led to their removal which culminated in the appointment of M.D. Abubakar as acting IGP by President Goodluck Jonathan. Expectedly, Mr. Abubakar's appointment has also generated a lot of accusations and wide public condemnation including from Plateau State Government. The reason is that he had earlier been indicted by Justice Niki Tobi Panel of Inquiry on 2001 Jos Religious Killings as he was alleged to have given covert support to his Muslim tribesmen (Hausa-Fulani settlers) in the killing of many Christian indigenes. According to the Panel:

*Religious fanatics should not be posted to head state police commands. The commission recommends that for his ignoble role during the September 2001 crises, which resulted in the loss of lives, the former Commissioner of Police, Plateau State Command, Alhaji M.D. Abubakar, be advised to retire from the Nigeria Police Force*

*and in the event of his refusal to do so, he should be dismissed from the service. The government should forward the recommendation to the Police Service Commission for consideration and necessary action* (see: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/01/plateau-govt-condemns-abubakars-appointment-as-igp/> Also *Thisday Newspaper*, 26 Jan., 2012).

Thus, the foregoing displays the poor professional credentials and inability of the public security sector especially the police in maintaining law and order or simply in providing the general security needs of the people. As a matter of fact, the problem of insecurity that characterizes Nigerian state since independence cannot be entirely blamed on public security agencies. However, lack of capacity on the part of government to guarantee the economic security of Nigerian people is another major factor responsible for the endemic insecurity being experienced in the country particularly since the 1980s. The disarticulated economic system left behind by the colonizers lacked any prospects to boost the local economy for any meaningful growth, making it difficult for Nigeria and indeed most African countries to contribute above 2% to the world economy. Certainly, the ailing political system inherited by the nationalists remains an obstacle to the development of Nigerian state. The attendant weak political institutions and state structure coupled with legitimacy crisis has made 'Africa's own rush towards development ... amid an unforgiving capitalist world economy' (Chan 2007: 94) a mere effort in futility.

Indeed, the last straw that has broken the camel's back is the inherent problem of maladministration and prevalent corruption by various segments of Nigerian state most especially the ruling elite. This problem has further increased the economic woes being suffered by the country. The fiasco recorded from adopting Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s under draconian regime of General Babangida against public outcry dealt terrible blows to the nation's economy. The contradictions put into bear by the SAP regime led to massive unemployment, incessant public protests, to mention a few (Mkandawire & Soludo 1999; Simon 1995). The use of police and military by successive governments to suppress mass protests and rapidly growing incidence of unemployment since the 1980s have attracted criminalization of the public security sector and high crime rates.

Over-circulation of illegal arms and light weapons among civilians coupled with other factors most of which have earlier been mentioned have led to high level of violent crime and criminality. The pattern and level of crime in the country has overwhelmed the capacity of the public security sector in the maintenance of law and order. The inability of public law enforcement agents to adequately provide security needs of various segments of the public and failure to address the growing problem of crime has nonetheless created a vacuum in security management in the country. It is at this point that the coming on board of private security guards has become inevitable. No doubt, the

experiences in recent times have shown that the private security guards have been able to fill the vacuum to some extent but not without having their own challenges, which often adversely affect their operations and their ability to meet the overall objectives of private security activities in Nigeria.

### **The Evolution of Private Security Guards in Nigeria**

The involvement of private players in the management of security locally and internationally has become phenomenal in recent times. Considering the historical development of private security companies in Nigeria, one will not but agree that the presence and activities of private security guards laid the foundation for the emergence of private security companies in Nigeria. The use of guards working individually or those commissioned by unregistered private security companies had been in existence prior to the nation's independence. The use of thugs or some party members for private security became noticeable at independence and this habit has continued till date in Nigeria. Investigation and Security Company (NISCO), the first private security outfit providing uniformed guards in Nigeria came into being in 1965, and since then the number of existing private security firms has drastically increased. The recruitment of party thugs into local police by politicians prior to 1966 coup (led by Major Kaduna) and brutal use of those local police forces necessitated the clamour for dissolution of local or regional police in Nigeria. (Ahire, 1993; Rotimi, 1993; Ohonbamu, 1972, Tamuno, 1970). For instance, Ohonbamu (1972) asserts that:

*In the Western Region there were mass recruitment into the local forces of party thugs and stalwarts - people against whom the police were supposed to be giving protection to the law abiding citizens.*

Such problem was not peculiar to only the south-western Nigeria but it was a regular occurrence in all parts of Nigeria. To buttress this point, Ahire (1993) reveals the ugly trend of brutal and oppressive use of the Native Authority (NA) Police by ruling elites against their perceived opponents in northern Nigeria, and according to him:

*The fiercest criticisms of the NA police system relate to its handling of opposition politicians in the 1950s when party politics started in Nigeria. It is on record that NA police forces earned notoriety by using undue coercion and intimidation to enlist support for the ruling part[y]; deny opposition parties permits for rallies; disrupt meetings of opposition parties and generally enforced the obnoxious 'unlawful assembly' laws against opposition politicians. The excesses of NA police forces in support of the ruling party in Northern Nigeria prompted a loud outcry which eventually led to their extinction (Ahire, 1993: 257).*

## *Analyzing the Evolution of Private Security Guards* By Kasali

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The criticisms of the nefarious activities of the local police forces in various regions of the country led to their dissolution by the General Gowon regime in 1966 as recommended by the Working Party on Police and Prison Services in Nigeria, a panel set up by General Ironsi who was later killed in a counter-coup in 1966. Today, police institution despite its national outlook has continued to portray regressive, anti-social, oppressive, unethical and brutal values for which the local police forces were dissolved. The demand for security and inability of the public security agents to meet the security needs of various segments of the public have necessitated the growing acceptance being enjoyed by private security guards in the country. The services of private security guards have continued to be sought by individuals and corporate bodies to safeguard the security of their lives and property.

Paucity of funds has made it difficult for government in Nigeria to have adequate size of police and armed forces. The size of police personnel is highly insufficient to meet the security needs of the people. This situation has led to the privatization of public security agents especially the police. The commoditization of police services in the country has further complicated the problem of inefficiency of the police in the discharge of its duties. This situation reinforces the disconnection between public safety and police. The interest and security of the elite and a few wealthy individuals and organisations have remained basic preoccupations of Nigeria Police. The wide power that federal government has on public security sector has continued to pose a huge threat to good governance and inter-governmental relations in the country, as the government at centre can witch-hunt any state governments perceived as enemies or opponents. The illegal impeachment episodes under Obasanjo administration remain a point of reference for the call for introduction of state police, which can also be abused by chief executives of various states to crucify their opponents and law abiding citizens.

It is worrisome that despite the government ban on militia groups, they have continued to be popular among large segment of Nigerian society especially south-western Nigeria in providing services to meet the security needs of the people. Many wealthy individuals, organizations and communities often seek the services of O'dua Peoples' Congress (OPC) guards to provide alternative security for them when the public security sector has failed to live up to public expectations. It was even an indictment on Nigerian Police and Federal Government of Nigeria, as a sitting governor, Bola Tinubu (now former governor of Lagos State), in reacting to the armed robbery attack of retired Justice Fatai Willaims, declared in public that if Nigeria Police could not address the problem of rising incidence of violent crime particularly armed robbery and assassination, he would have no choice other than employing the services of O'dua Peoples' Congress to contain the activities of criminals (The Post Express, June 14, 2000).

Nevertheless, security has thus become a major part of the Nigerian economy, and it is estimated that there are currently between 1,500 and 2,000 private security companies (PSCs) in Nigeria, with employment of more than 100,000 people who serve as guards

(Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005). As it were, in Nigeria, there is no adequate official record concerning the number of private security companies existing in the country till date. The reason is that many of the existing private security outfits are not registered and their activities are not sufficiently regulated. The speedily growing nature of private security companies producing guards is very much evident not only in Nigeria but also virtually in every part of the globe particularly the Eastern Europe, Middle-East and Africa (Howe, 1998).

Generally, the estimates of the existing private security companies in the country stand at more than 1200 (Keku & Akingbade, 2003), most of which are small outfits operating in a town or in very few local settlements, and the number of personnel in the entire private security sector is almost one hundred thousand people (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005). The major private security companies in Nigeria include Prudential Security (having almost 9000 guards with operation covering the entire country), Halogen Security (having nearly 4,000 guards and its operation covers the whole country) as well as few other companies like Bemil Security and Corporate Guards (ibid). The largest non-indigenous or foreign private security company in the country is Group4Securicor's partner Outsourcing Services Ltd. (OSL), having its operation in all states of the federation with staff strength of about 3,000 guards (ibid).

Apart from the large retinue of police and armed forces, many oil companies often contract the services of a number of private security guards from both local and foreign private security companies to augment the activities of public security agents with the aim of adequately reducing the impact of the risks that may emanate from of any attack or mitigate activities that can pose a threat to the general security of these oil companies. The importance of the complementary roles being played by private security guards is emphasized by many of these oil companies. For instance, oil companies like ExxonMobil and Shell usually employ a sizeable number of private guards who are trained by the Nigeria Police as 'Spy' police (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005). Apart from intelligence activities, trained guards may be mandated to perform some other tasks including security of infrastructural facilities of their employers. The Spy police in Shell, ExxonMobil and ChevronTexaco alone are more than two thousand (ibid).

Due to non-permission of private security guards to carry arms like gun in Nigeria, a number of clients often employ the services of public security agents by applying to the relevant authorities, so that they can have armed unit that will fortify the activities of private security guards. Most embassies, oil companies and other organizations contract the services of private security guards to general security tasks that don't usually involve the use of arms; they often seek the services of Mobile Police unit of Nigeria Police to provide armed support for the general security operations. For instance, in Shell alone, there is presence of no less than 600 Mobile Policemen in its operations to complement activities of private security guards on its pay-roll (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005).

The policemen and officers get instructions from their superiors within the respective organizations they work for. Police authorities largely control the activities and postings

of these police personnel, and clients or management of the private security companies lack the power to direct the affairs of the police personnel that perform the task of giving armed support for the general security operations. The *Private Guard Companies Act (1986)* outlaws the use of fire arms by any private security guards in Nigeria, and based on this reason, many private security companies have developed an armed unit through employing the services of Mobile Police.

Despite the existence of relevant law banning private guards from carrying arms, there are many unregistered private security companies or/and militia groups that encourage their guards to carry weapons for their private security activities. Government has found it difficult to control the circulation of arms and light weapons among guards commissioned by unregistered companies. For instance, OPC guards often carry weapons in the course of carrying-out their duties or providing for the security needs of their clients. Many of these guards have become the choice of many communities in south-western Nigeria. They are mostly employed as neighborhood night guards, as many wealthy individuals also contract their services.

Resulting from the signing of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Act No. 2 of 2003 and Amendment Act of 2007 into law, the Private Guard Companies Department (PGC) of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has been mandated or authorized to conduct general supervision and monitoring of private security companies operating in Nigeria. In regulating the operations and affairs of various private security companies in Nigeria, NSCDC requests that all private security organizations should be registered.

The phenomenal growth of private security establishments in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa is occasioned by a number of factors including endemic insecurity, the liquidation of the Soviet bloc or cold war, incidence of globalization, privatization and commercialization of public corporations, drastic reduction in the size of armed forces, emerging professionalization of the military and police, growing concern for profit-making, the continued opening-up of the involvement of private organizations or players in arms trade, among others (Gumedze, 2007). In war torn Afghanistan, there has been increasing presence of private security guards that provide different security services, and by 2009, the total number of private security guards in that country has reached over five thousand (Sherman & DiDomenico, 2009).

### **Challenges Confronting Private Security Guards in Nigeria**

One of the challenges of private security guards in Nigeria is **lack of adequate training**. Most private security companies are always in the habits of recruiting people as guards with very little or no training. Many of the private security guards undergo only physical fitness as training while they have no knowledge of several other aspects of security training including intelligence collection and analysis, martial arts, crowd control, riot control, data mining and automated data analysis in crime mitigation, to mention a few.

This problem is not peculiar to unregistered private security firms but also many registered and big security outfits show little interest to periodical training of their guards while all they care for is to maximize profits. This problem has been responsible for the incompetence and inefficiency in the activities of many private guards in Nigeria.

**The problem of poor wages and working conditions** appears to be one of the leading factors militating against efficiency in private security activities in the country. In spite of high cost of living, many private security guards earn salaries as low as N6,000 (less than US\$40) per month (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005). It is unfortunate that government has never considered in its regulation of private security activities the importance of prioritizing the welfare of guards commissioned by various private security companies in the country.

Though, one cannot but agree with government if it argues that it cannot prevail on all private security firms to improve the welfare of their guards because it is not all of them that are registered, but the truth of the matter is that both unregistered and registered companies are culprits of pauperization of guards. The decisions of most unregistered private firms to “pay guards according to the value of individual contracts, so that in effect guards at the same level and with the same experience earn different wages depending on where the company deploys them” (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2005: 8). Poor working conditions confronting a large number of private security guards in the country are making many of them having low job satisfaction, which has led to low job performance and lack of commitment to the job among them.

**The cost of registration** is another challenge facing not only the private security guards but also quite a number of private security companies. According to the NSCDC Act 2003 as amended in 2007 which authorizes the NSCDC as the regulatory agency, to perform functions of registering private security companies operating in Nigeria. The Act mandates every private security firm wishing to be registered to have a minimum capital base of ₦10 million (Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Act No. 2 of 2003 and Amendment Act of 2007). The high cost of getting a private security company registered has made many private security providers to be operating without being licensed, making it difficult for government to regulate the operations of all private security outfits in the country. Thus, inadequate regulation of all existing private security companies may attract some risks because the activities of various guards commissioned by the unregistered firms cannot be adequately monitored. And in a situation where a security guard commissioned by unregistered private security firm errs, it will be difficult for the regulatory agency to communicate with such organization.

**Risk of violent attacks** is another challenge being experienced by private security guards in Nigeria. The *Private Guard Companies Act (1986)* has made the stand of government known on non-permission of private security guards to provide armed services in the country. Private security guards are not permitted to carry specific weapons like guns in Nigeria, and in performing their duties, the lives of many of them are usually at risk. This is because the criminals are often equipped with more dangerous weapons like guns and

grenades, and the private guards face the risk of losing their lives by confronting the armed criminals. This situation has led to untimely deaths of many private security guards in Nigeria.

**Politics of dichotomy** that exists between the local and foreign private security companies in Nigeria is another challenge worth-mentioning. There is rivalry between indigenous private security firms and the foreign private security companies due to the belief by the former that their guards are under-engaged because of the preference that most multinational corporations have for the latter in seeking for private security services. This problem is raging on as many local private security players have continued to call on government to deregister all existing foreign private security companies operating in the country as a way of developing the indigenous private security firms. If the wish of the local private security players comes into fruition, many private security guards commissioned by these foreign firms face the threat of losing their jobs.

**The problem of overzealousness and brutality** poses a huge challenge to private security activities in Nigeria. There have been cases where activities of some private security guards have been criticized especially where guards infringe on the fundamental rights of innocent civilians in providing the security needs of their clients. This problem is more visible among guards commissioned by unregistered companies particularly the ethnic militias. The habits of brutality among some OPC guards have become a subject of national debate in recent times. Many innocent citizens have been killed with charms and/or guns and other dangerous weapons by some overzealous OPC guards, a situation which has led to public repudiation and criminalization of the private security activities of this militia group.

The unlawful activities of Bakassi Boys have made the public acceptance that the group previously enjoyed to rapidly dwindle, making the public to doubt its relevance in the management of people's security. There is no doubt that when this group first emerged it had a good intention but politicization of the group has led to the demonization of its activities, and it is no longer enjoy any popular support in the country. The guards working for registered companies have also been accused of being reckless in the discharge of their duties. For instance, many commuters and innocent civilians have either been injured or killed by the reckless driving and overzealousness of bullion van drivers and policemen attached to some private security companies.

## **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, from the start of 21st century, Nigeria and the entire world have begun to record a rapid increase in the number of private security companies, as many have continued to spring-up yearly, even monthly to complement the activities of public security agencies. The attendant sharing of legitimate application of violence with private organizations by the state has become evident since the beginning of this century as many

private security companies are now performing the functions of the armed forces (see Shreier and Caparini, 2005). This development is a departure from the central notion of the Weberian State that explains security in terms of unilateral legitimization or monopoly use of physical violence by the state as the only creature on whom conferred the business of providing the security to the people (Hutchful, 2000).

Though, private security guards have been able, to some extent, to complement the activities of the public security agents in security management but the challenges confronting them have drastically reduced their capacities to effectively provide essential services for the security needs of their clients. These challenges have hitherto attracted public criticisms of the activities of many private security guards, to the extent that some stakeholders are calling for proscription of private security companies in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, private security guards have contributed meaningful in the provision of security services in the country but for optimal performance and efficiency, the government needs to reduce the cost of registering private security companies in the country so that many unregistered private security firms operating in the country will have no reason not to facilitate their registration. The activities of the private security sector need to be more regulated and the issues of training and good working conditions of the private guards should be given a priority attention by the regulatory authorities. It is also recommended that private security companies should be mandated by the government to provide all their guards with bullet proof vests to reduce the risk of losing their lives since they are not allowed to carry guns and they may have an encounter with armed criminals in the discharge of their duties.

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