

Challenges of Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria and the Way Forward

Introduction

In the last two decades of representative rule in the Nigeria, there is the seeming view and widespread belief that the country is imploding as its structures and substructures of ideas, persons and institutions are unravelling. This is more so in the last six years of the period. On the basis of this view and belief, there is the feeling of helplessness on the part of most Nigerians that those saddled with the task of governance and providing direction seemed uninterested and unconcerned.

The development in the country is not unexpected. After years of having guns trained on Nigerians, the coming of representative rule provided a breath of fresh air that enable people to assess and reassess their relationship. The rumbling all over the country is part of this reassessment. It is in the nature of intergroup and intragroup relations for this development to unfold. This is because nation building is an unending process particularly for a multiethnic state-nation such as Nigeria. Nigeria has neither an accepted state and/or the awareness to begin the process of constructing one nation off its nationalities under democratic rule.

The foundation of all substructures is the function of the foundation of the structure(s). The structure(s) in Nigeria have faulty foundation. Thus persons and institutions are confronting numerous problems that seemed intractable. There is a seeming sense of siege as the problems are almost always occurring at the same time. The state of Fire and Rescue Service is not an exception.

Prior to the developments occasioned by the dawn of representative rule, the Fire and Rescue Service was hardly the priority of governments at all levels in terms building the capacity of persons, institutions and infrastructures in the course of providing governance in that sector. The Service thus made the transition into the representative rule period with loads of problem stretching through the quality of personnel, equipment, infrastructures, disparities and welfare.

To understand and appreciate the challenges bedvilling the Fire and Rescue Service, it is important to examine them within the framework of "an imperative of national security" as captured in this year's theme. Unless there is a clear conceptualisation and policy framework for security which birthed national security, the inclusion of "fire safety management" inside the portfolio of national security is uncertain. This explained the persistence of the challenges, at a time of immense uncertainty all over the country, triggering concerns

requiring the attention of the Fire and Rescue Service, and the consequent inability of the sector to respond accordingly.

This paper set out to examine the challenges of the sector within the frameworks of security and national security. To accomplish this task, the paper is divided into sections. This include on frameworks of analysis; the old security and national security narrative; the new security and national security idea; challenges of Fire and Rescue Service; conclusion—the new framework as the way forward.

On Frameworks of Analysis: Security and National Security

To get a sense of the challenges confronting not only the Fire and Rescue Service but most Nigerians and Nigeria as whole or as I noted at the beginning of the paper the structures and substructures of ideas, persons and institutions, it is important to work within the frameworks of security and national security.

This is not only in deference to the theme of this Conference. It is because the entire enterprise and end-state of human being and being human falls within security which as I argued birthed national security. The use of security and/or national security is based on choice, politics and country practice. In Nigeria, it is largely driven by politics and practice even as it was never governed by any legislation and policy.

I am of the view that of national security which is made up of two words – national and security – security is the independent variable and national the dependent variable. Thus it is the meaning of security that requires resolution in order to give national security meaning within the confine of a nation.

The frameworks to examine, reexamine and/or to create falls within the following questions on security and national security in Nigeria. What is security? Whose security? What is a security issue? How can security be achieved? What is national security? Whose national security? What is a national security issue? How can national security be achieved?

Finding answers to these questions direct attention to the challenges of the Fire and Rescue Service within the “fire safety management an imperative of national security” on the one hand and on the other hand the way forward in order to up the performance of the sector.

Unless we understand security’s history, sociology and politics on the one hand and on the other hand the country-specific construction and constitution, we cannot know that we have for too long trivialised security’s all-encompassing purpose for human being and being human.

As a word, security first originated in the 15th century from the Latin words "securus", securitas and the English word "secure". They mean "free from care", "being secure", "something which secures" and "absence of apprehension".

These philosophies – free from care, being secure, something which secures or absence of apprehension – of security birthed every other use and association of security in the world including and especially its association with the "safety of state". Within these philosophies, there is the United States of America's national security conception with arguably the oldest legislation – 1947 – governing the theory and practice of national security and the Peoples' Republic of China's national security law of 2020 representing the most recent. Where and what is Nigeria's "national security" and/or "security" law?

For the United States, "economic security is national security"; for the Peoples' Republic of China, collusion, subversion and terrorism is national security; for Israel, its physical survival amidst hostile neighbours is security; for Pakistan, its relation with India and its frontline role as a Sunni state with nuclear weapon and in the pursuit of United States interest is security; for North Korea, it is its status as a communist state, geopolitics in relation to South Korea and Japan and America's security guarantee to these countries and above all else its possession of nuclear capability and; for Nigeria, what is "national security" and/or "security"?

On the Old "Security" and "National Security" Narrative and the Exclusion of Fire and Rescue Service

If I am to ask the audience the question what is security and what is national security, I will have diverse answers as there are diverse persons in this hall. However, the answers can be distilled into the socialised experience of security and/or national security persons in this hall received from military rule socialisation on the one hand and on the other hand the belief that people in this uniformed profession belong to the security and national security fraternity.

The answers will not come from any conscious schooling of persons in this hall to any security and national security tradition. The answers will not come from legislation that says this is security and national security. The answers will not come from policy pronouncement on security and national security.

The answers will come from the fact that for years most persons in this hall and indeed most Nigerians have been socialised into believing that the name and work of the members of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) is security, any practice associated with the MILE constitute security and that national security is any terrain constitutive of their work.

This view came with years of military rule and military rule socialisation of most Nigerians into their tradition on the one hand and on the other hand the received wisdom of the

practice of security by countries including the United States of America for which Nigeria imitate and/or copy.

If this is true, the last twenty two years and in particular the last six years leaves no one in doubt that this security and/or national security failed, is failing and will continue to fail. The reason is that it is not reflective of Nigeria's history, experience and reality (HER) and not in tandem with the current democratic rule framework and needs of Nigerians.

The prevailing narrative of security and national security is old, archaic and ceased to function twenty two years ago. There was never any governance for this old narrative of security and national security making the latter selective and exclusive to hierarchies of persons with power and authority to define, include and exclude persons and institutions in the narrative.

Thus the answers to the four fundamental questions on security and national security under the old and archaic narrative and by extant practice comprised: security is the military, intelligence and law enforcement; security is about the state and government; anything and everything that threaten the state and government at a particular time; the use of the military, intelligence and law enforcement. National security is the safety of state and government; state, government and selected persons and institutions; anything and everything designated by persons with power and authority as threatening to the state, government and selected persons; national security can be achieved by neutralising all threats using all means at the disposal of the MILE.

Within the confine of this narrative of security and national security, the Fire and Rescue Service, although a uniformed non-arm bearing agency, does not belong to this fraternity. Security and national security is exclusively the name and work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) agencies. It is therefore not surprising that in the non-legislative, non-policy and imitation-driven conception of security and national security lacking Nigeria's history, experience and reality (HER), the Fire and Rescue Service was excluded as are most other agencies of the government.

Indeed the continuation of this perspective of security and national security over two decades down the line when the framework for this – military rule – no longer prevail is the reason for the incremental implosion of crisis and conflict in Nigeria. The military type security intensified the reverse of "free from care", "being secure", "something which secure" and "absence of apprehension".

A most distressing reminder of the currency of this old, archaic, apprehension-inducing and outdated security and national security narratives resonated throughout Mr. President's Democracy Day Address. The references magnified the fear of the continuation of the failed, failing and outdated tradition. In particular, Paragraph 56 of Mr. President's Address referred to the now ubiquitous, much abused and self-serving Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy "notably Section 14 (2) (b)". Mr. President promised to "do all

within my power to ensure the Security and welfare of the people remain the primary purpose of government". This much was the persistent claim of every member of government at all levels beginning with the executives and legislatures in the last twenty two years.

The clincher, reinstating the currency of the old and outdated security, was contained in Paragraph 57. Mr. President noted that "I have, throughout my tenure, provided the 'security agencies' with all they require relative to available resources and will be providing more as the dynamics unfold to put an end to our 'security' problems'. What is "security"? What is our "security problems"?

In the context of Mr. President's Address, there was no place for the Fire and Rescue Service in this twenty two years outdated security and national security narratives. Similarly, there is no place for other institutions except the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE).

On the New Security and National Security Framework and the Inclusion of the Fire and Rescue Service

I argued that Nigeria's security and national security narrative lacked governance or governance of security. By this I mean it is not supported by legislation/policy stating what is security, whose security, what is a security issue and how can security be achieved and did not factor the history, experience and reality (HER) of most Nigerians and Nigeria.

To create a new framework for security in order to jumpstart the national security complex, the framework of Nigeria - the state - has to be reconstituted. Nigeria is made up of not less than two hundred and fifty and slightly above five hundred ethnic nationalities.

The Nigerian state is the collective agreement of its nationalities. The Nigerian state is most disagreeable to most Nigerians as demonstrated in the last twenty two years. There is no relationship between the state's idea - assuming there is a governing idea - with the institutions and physical body. This is the first step to creating security and that which will constitute national security. Mr. President's Democracy Day Address alluded to this correctly when it apportioned the task for doing this to the legislature. Paragraphs 49, 50, 51 and 52 clearly noted that this responsibility was that of the National Assembly.

I have noted repeatedly in my exposition that of the two arms of government - the executives and legislatures - the legislatures was saddled with the responsibility of evolving and making new laws, reviewing, updating and amending existing laws in tandem with the democracy ideology and the oversight of ministries, departments and agencies. In these two areas, the legislatures have underperformed significantly since 1999. The evidence for this is the state of governance all over the country. In terms of legislation, what we find the legislators doing is going after populist legislations and/or copying/imitating other cultures legislations without regard to difference of history, sociology and politics and history, experience and reality (HER).

The hard work of evolving new policy areas into legislations that will improve life and livelihood of their constituencies have been relegated to secondary position. This also applied to the issue of old laws in various areas of human endeavours. There are laws in the exclusive list that should be moved to the concurrent list and reviewed, updated and amended to create fresh opportunity and unleash creativity on the part of the implementing authorities and the people. The legislatures lacked the interest to do this even as they have been fully motivated and resourced to carry out this task effortlessly. This view applied to the old security and national security narratives. As I noted:

“if the military and military rule define security within their job description of defence, how should the elected political class define security? Should the political class not define security within their job description of governance that encompasses most things beginning with the foundation of security, the economy? Should the political class not follow the security type advocated by Anthony Burke that ‘security should not be seen as one good among many. Security should be the good that guarantees all others’. Should the Nigerian political class define security in the context of their difficult experience in the hands of the military as the quid pro quo that security is today? Where is the difference between the elected political class and the military class in the definition of security? Of the political and military class, who should own and drive security today?”

Nigeria’s legislatures are responsible for the lack of evolution of security legislation and thus national security conception in tandem with democracy ideology twenty two years down road!

In the context of Nigeria of the last twenty two years and assuming that ethnic nationalities agreed on a constitutional framework for a state, there is need for the government particularly the legislatures to construct a security legislation that would guide all other policies of the public and private sector. In the light of the failure of “security” and/or “national security” of the military type under civil rule of the last twenty two years and in the light of most Nigerians’ feeling of apprehension under military rules which prompted their enlisting on the democracy train that drove the military and their “security” and/or “national security” out of power in favour of elected rule, the need to examine the unexamined “security” and/or “national security” could not have been more urgent for the legislatures under civil rule.

What should the new framework of security be? The new framework is based on the four fundamental question – what is security, whose security, what is a security issue and how can security be achieved. Security is wellbeing and being well in its entire forms; individual, group,

human being and being human; anything and everything that promotes, advances and defend wellbeing or security of individual, group, human being and being human; embedding the pursuit of wellbeing or security as the goal of all policies in the public and private sector.

This is what Anthony Burke described as “security should be the good that guarantees all others”. This will put to rest the failed and failing old and outdated framework of security and national security represented by Burke’s “security ...as one good among many”.

In this framework, the importance and work of the Fire and Rescue Service will be considered security or wellbeing issue and will be treated accordingly. In what I described as the hierarchies of security needs (hSn) or security scale of preference (sSp), the work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) will come at the bottom of the hSn or sSp. The Fire and Rescue Service will be among the first top ten security or wellbeing issues.

As I noted, if security is wellbeing and being well in all of its forms, what should constitute Hierarchy of Security Needs (hSn) or Security Scale of Preference (sSp) for most Nigerians? Every other wellbeing and being well-creating or security-creating issue will come at the top first with the work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE) at the bottom of the hSn or sSp for most Nigerians.

It is because every other wellbeing and being well-creating or security-creating issue is not working and/or has been made not to work through structural impediments and/or the unwillingness and incompetence of the political class particularly the legislatures that put the work of the military, intelligence and law enforcement on the top of the hSn or sSp in today’s Nigeria’s undefined, uncharted and ungoverned “security”. There lies the foundation of the challenges bedvilling the Fire and Rescue Service.

Challenges of Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria

There is no time like now for Nigeria to have an unchallenged fully functional and efficient Fire and Rescue Service with the gathering cloud of uncertainty and the threatening implosion in the horizon. The Fire and Rescue Service should be available to mitigate the likely damage to lives and properties should there be implosion in the country. In the present state of the Service, this is not feasible at every tier of the Service. The reasons for this state of affair derived from the challenges confronting the Service.

There are two dimensions of challenges in the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria. The first dimension of challenge is the security and national security type within which fire safety is or is not an imperative. The second dimension of challenges includes legislation, infrastructures, governance, quality of personnel, equipment, disparities of service and welfare. There is an

organic link between these two dimensions as the existence of the framework of the first dimension clear the way for tackling the second dimension.

As the frameworks of analysis indicated, Nigeria is hampered by the continuation of the old, archaic and outdated security and national security narratives. In this, the Fire and Rescue Service did not constitute one of the imperatives of this security and national security narrative. Nigeria's contented, contemptuous, compromised and lily livered legislatures are yet to see the need for a new security and national security complex to provide for every item of governance that humanise human beings and institutionalised institutions including and especially the Fire and Rescue Service.

Legislation: The state of legislation and its currency in the light of the perennial changes in the sector is one of the most important challenges of the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria. The state of legislation governing the Services at the federal, state and local government levels affect performance of the Services. What is the state of the legislation of the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria at the federal, state and local government levels? What is the relationship between the three tiers within the legislations? What is the funding level of the Services considering its capital intensive nature? Does the legislations take into cognisance the dynamism in the sector including and especially the changing nature of equipment, training, retraining and the need to constantly keep abreast of the condition?

Assuming funds were allocated to the sector at all levels and assuming there was no misuse of fund from the appropriating authorities to the Service, would the fund be sufficient to cater for the need of the Services in terms of equipment and training? Does the legislations' funding clauses covered aspect such as public-private partnership for funding and special tax to meeting the changing needs of the Services?

Arguably the issue of legislation and in particular its dynamism should be of concern to the Services. This is in conjunction with the various legislative arms of government at all levels. This is to release the Services from encumbrances that would arise from inadequate legislative provisions particularly at the states and local government levels.

Infrastructures: I noted the capital intensive nature of the equipment available for fire and rescue. This equipment required the enabling environment for its optimum performance. There is need for road, water, electricity and communication infrastructures at all levels to enable the Services utilise the equipment at its disposal.

At the Kwara Conference in 2019, I drew attention to the issue of infrastructures constituting a cog in the wheel of progress of the effectiveness of equipment. In particular, I used the metaphor of "bucket" and "robot" to compare the state of infrastructures of the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria and other developed and discerning developing countries (DDDC).

The state of infrastructures particularly at the states level has not improved significantly since then. While the state capitals have some modicum of access roads, water, electricity and communication equipment, the same cannot be said of the adjoining communities. Access through roads are limited and poor thus hampering the movement of trucks and equipment; there are no pipe borne water connecting all the nooks and crannies of the communities to enable refilling by fire trucks; the electricity and communication equipment is poor and unstable thus affecting the control rooms' interface with firemen and women on the field and with community members requiring their services.

One can use "bucket" and "robot" as metaphor to describe the type and/or state of technologies at the disposal of the fire department of different countries of the world. Of the bucket and robot types, Nigeria's firefighting capacity falls under the former than the latter. In fact where there is the rudiment of the latter, its effectiveness and thus efficiency is hampered by the persistent absence, insufficiency and poorly maintained infrastructures that characterised the country. There is wide gap between the economic superstructure and infrastructure in Nigeria.

The technology of fighting fire is a compendium that includes all the infrastructures like access roads, motorised vehicles, ladders, safety equipment for the personnel, chemicals, hydrants, communication services etc.

Governance:By governance I am referring the effective and effective utilisation of human and material resources for the benefit of the Fire and Rescue Service at the level of the appropriating authorities and the level of the Services. Clearly, resource allocation is inadequate considering the task confronting the Services at all level. Thus managing the meager resources in order to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery remained a herculean challenge in Nigeria. Taming the human element of mismanagement – theft of resources – is one of the three planks of this administration's governance agenda.

Until the chain in resource allocation that constitute the level of theft learn to commit the inadequate fund allocated to the sector for the purpose it was meant for, the performance of the Fire and Rescue Service will be constrained. While this view applied to the Federal Service, the paternalistic disposition of some states to the sector personalised the allocation and thus misappropriation of resources for the Services.

Equipment:Modern fire and rescue service is about equipment. It is the availability of equipment for the service and the complementary infrastructures for the operationalisation of the equipment that provide the Service with the enabling environment to fulfill its mandate to the people of Nigeria.

How equipped is the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria? How equipped is the Federal Fire Service? How equipped is the States Fire Service and its local component? I want to recall the "bucket" and "robot" metaphor of the Kwará Conference where I addressed the issue of the use of technology to enhance service delivery. Of these questions, the former - FFS - appeared to be keeping up appearance in terms of the use of technology. The latter - SFS - in some leading states with economic activities, occasionally put up appearances of providing modern equipment for its Fire and Rescue Service once in a blue moon. The overall score is that the Fire and Rescue Service still remain ensconced in the "bucket" technology and equipment world.

There is an unmatched dynamism in the changing technology of Fire and Rescue Service. There are new generations of equipment in the works that will change the face of fire and rescue service. How much of this dynamism we are able to keep up with will determine the ability of the sector to deliver on its mandates. The equipment ranged from infrastructures, personnel kits, fire engines, trucks and utility vehicles, operational centres, communication and chemicals.

All these equipment are product of technology and most of these are not produced in Nigeria. Above all else, they are lacking in the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria.

Disparities of Service and Welfare: One of the principal challenges of the Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria is the disparities occasioned by Nigeria's so-called federal structure and the impact it has on the welfare of the personnel of the sector. Under the 1999 Constitution, Nigeria is a federation made up of the centre, states and local councils. The Fire and Rescue Service come under the concurrent legislative list where all the structures collaborated.

Thus there is a Federal Fire Service controlled by the central government, there is the State Fire Service controlled by the States and should the so-called federal structure worked in its fiscal component as it should, there should have been Local Government Fire Service. At the moment, the State Fire Service extends its structure to the Local Government Councils. At the heart of the inefficiency of the Service and almost all other services in Nigeria is Nigeria's pretension to being federal state.

I have noted the disparities in all of the challenges I mentioned so far. They are found in the legislation, governance, infrastructures and equipment. The states and local councils merely make appearances in terms of having fire and rescue services. They are mostly forgotten and hardly the priority of the government i.e. if any aspect of governance is the priority of the leadership in place since 1999.

The disparities has affected performance of the service and impacted on the welfare of the personnel. The issue of welfare goes beyond remuneration and equipment to training and

retraining of the personnel to the issue of promotion, allowance and insurance. The Fire and Rescue Service is about the personnel first in their line of duties – a fact celebrated in countless movies on similar services in the developed world.

Conclusion: The New Framework as the Way Forward

The Fire and Rescue Service is clearly not one of the “imperatives” of the prevailing “national security” narrative – if there is a national security idea in Nigeria. As I observed, what should be national security should obtain from what is security first. It is security that determines national security.

Security is “free from care”, “something which secure”, “state of being secure” and “absence of apprehension”. National security should derive from these philosophies of security. I distinguished between the old and new security and national security. In the context of the old, archaic and outdated conception of security and thus that which constituted national security, the Fire and Rescue Service did not belong to this fraternity. Membership in the fraternity is exclusive to the members of the military, intelligence and law enforcement (MILE).

Most Nigerians have been victims of being socialised into this perspective of security in the course of military rule. In the last twenty two years, this perspective of security has been reinforced beyond even the expectation of the MILE that planted this seed in a supposedly representative rule environment that should have jumpstarted the process of reconstructing security and national security in tandem with democratic rule norms.

I argued for the construction of a new security and national security frameworks. This is the task of the legislatures of the last twenty two years of representative rule in Nigeria. Twenty two years of failed and failing old, archaic and outdated security and/or national security is enough experience to call for a new framework. This is a task they failed to carry out for reasons of fear and self-interest. They have persisted in applying the old, archaic and outdated frameworks even as it has stubbornly and repeatedly successfully failed.

In tandem with my concept of history, experience and reality (HER) and within the democratic norms, I improvised a new security and national security framework. Security is wellbeing of the individual in its entire forms. Under this framework, national security aggregates to anything and everything that confer wellbeing on every Nigerian.

With this framework in place in legislation and with security or wellbeing as cardinal objective of every public and private policy within a reconstituted Nigerian state and with the consistent pursuit and socialisation of most Nigerians to this security framework, Nigeria’s

politicians need not live in and relive their haunted lives under the threat of the military as most Nigerians will defend the cause that qualitatively and quantitatively improve their livelihoods on-the-go.

This is the framework that will make Fire and Rescue Service one of the “imperatives of national security”. This will begin the process of reducing the challenges confronting the sector to manageable limit as it works progressively for continuous improvement. This is for the long term.

In the short term, the Fire and Rescue Service at all levels should continue to manage the resources allocated to them judiciously to improve on their services. They should employ lobbyists to intensify lobbying with the legislatures for improved funding and legislations in order to address other areas of challenges within the prevailing old, archaic and outdated security and national security frameworks.