The Role of the Media in National Security in Nigeria 1960-1999

Dr. Anthony Danladi Ali
Department of International Studies and Diplomacy
Benson Idahosa University, Ugbor, GRA,
Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
This study focuses on the role of the media in national security in Nigeria in the period 1960 and 1999. The Nigerian mass media since independence has faced the greatest challenge of how to make itself relevant to the Nigerian society. First, the political class in its greed has employed the mass media as instrument for selfish and sectional loyalties. Consequently, media reports have greatly heightened tension and created suspicion among the citizens. Second, the mass media are increasingly internationalized in content and resulting to culture imperialism. Nigerian’s thirst for foreign consumables threatens the nation’s culture integrity. Third, Nigerian Journalist suffered insecurity of arbitrary arrest and detention in the days of military rule. Several decrees promulgated ousted press freedom. Journalist fought tenaciously against such constitutional edicts by its publications. Fourth, The proliferation of media organizations has brought about change in media ownership structure and tended towards the dangerous trend of promoting threat to national security. These issues would be discussed in this study. The study appraises and assesses the media since independence, through the ‘dark days’ of military rule to the new democracy in 1999.

Introduction
The study attempts to evaluate the role of the mass media in Nigeria’s national security from 1960 to 1999. The year 1960 s chosen as a convenient date for commencement of this study because it was the year in which Nigeria became self governing and at the same time the country started with a democratically elected government. 1999 is chosen as the terminal date for the study because it was in that year that Nigeria returned to full democracy after over fifteen year that the military held unto political power.

The mass media comprises the means by which a society disseminates and receives information. The traditional instruments of the mass media to the modern man are the newspapers, magazines, radio and television. The Journalist is a human being, he studies other human creatures, report about human being and human beings are the source of his information. In essence, journalism is a social relation. The information disseminated by the journalist could be harmful or useful depends on its contents. This is where the issue of security comes in. The media transmit messages about a particular society. No one else can play this role. The information is passed across a destination to achieve a goal.
National security borders on incidence that endangers human existence or welfare. Nigeria’s national security means the protection of the lives, rights, dignity and property of its citizens. It also means the protection of its resources, cultural integrity, territory, sovereignty and lawful institutions of the country. The aim of national security is to secure the just and equitable living conditions for all the citizens of the country. But the leadership of the country has failed in this respect. Security includes the means at the disposal of the government for protecting the state and its citizens from external aggression and internal insurrection. The state exists for the interest of defense, public safety, public morality etc. The freedom of expression and the press is an aspect of national security and it is necessary for a true democracy.

The freedom of expression and the press is crucial ingredient of democracy. The greatest challenge to the mass media in Nigeria today is how to make itself relevant to the Nigerian society particularly where democracy is on trial, and national institutions are taking shape. The press ought to tread warily and exercise discretion if it is to preserve its freedom. In the light of this national culture, religion, security and tradition should be treated with utmost care more-so that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state. It is in the light of this that the study discusses the role of the media in national security in Nigeria. The paper discusses how state security operatives, politicians and even journalist themselves endanger national security.

The Media and National Security

Nigeria’s national security means the protection of its resources, territory, sovereignty and lawful institutions of the country. The aim of national security is to secure the just and equitable living conditions of the country. Former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in appreciation of the need for closer co-operation and collaboration among the various security agencies and all other components that make up the Nigerian society stated in March 2001, that:

*The concept of national security shall be the aggregation of the security interest of the individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities and institutions which inhabit the territory of our great country, Nigeria.*

The President went further to identify the primary objectives of national security as:

*To strengthen the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to advance her interest and objectives, to contain instability, control crime, Eliminate corruption, enhance genuine development progress and growth, improve the welfare and wellbeing and quality of life of every citizen.* (Wali 2003 50)

The media is a principal player in the arena of national security. National security has been greatly threatened since independence. When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the mass media orientation shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity, identity and integration. The media became parochial in their content. They dedicate themselves to the articulation of particular ethnic interest (Udoudo & Asak 2008: 4)) Press reports during this period greatly heightened tension, which created suspicion among the citizenry and almost led to the disintegration of the corporate existence of the country. Udoudo and Asak noted that
The news media seemed to have abandoned their core duty of truthfully reporting events, activities and personalities.
Instead they joined the fray, individual taking sides either in favour or against the government in power. (Ududo & Asak, 2008: 5).

As a result of the threat to Nigeria’s internal security nominal strength of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) has continued to increase from 13,500 in 1961 to 84,955 in 1978 and to 200,000 in 1980. (Ugbegili, 2008: 13) Security is part of public interest and a mass media professional must have a genuine interest in people. The primary focus of a mass media is on issues that benefit the general public and uphold fairness, justice, national unity and international co-operation. (Gambo in Akinfeleye, 2003: 12) The function of the press in any given society includes surveillance of the environment, correlation of the component of society in responding to the environment and transmission of the social heritage. (Wali, 2003: 17)

The media functions as watchdog capable of blowing the whistle to call attention to serious national issues. This implies a clear recognition of the fact that the media plays an important role on issues of national security. The power of the media to decide what the people should read, see or hear has never been in doubt. What has been in the centre of controversy is the capacity of those in whose hands reside such enormous powers to use that power judiciously and in public interest. Media professionals have the options to use the power of media instruments in their hands either to serve the nation or indulge in self-propelled interest. The media ought to be objective as it carries out its functions.

Mainly because of its social role in informing and educating the masses the Nigerian press is always made to be seen at the centre of any national crisis. This has caused the Nigerian media to be reduced overtime to mere tools in the hands of the governing class to legitimize and perpetuate their illegitimate rule. The political class has found it easy to impose its will on the media because of the challenges that media practitioners had to face in the course of discharging their duties. Such challenges include poor remunerations, poor conditions of service, job insecurity, nepotism, exposure to hazards, inadequate facilities for research and development and so on. (Ofuafor 2008: 1)

The traditional role of the media in any society is to inform, educate, entertain, publicize and perhaps most importantly, correct the excesses of society. But unfortunately the Nigerian media has not lived up to expectation in keeping to the path of honour. The media has not lived above nepotism, bribery or monetary inducement and blackmail. The media has in some cases fallen under the influence of king makers, quota system, ethnic bias, religious bigotry etc. The media has over the years been colored, shaped or influenced by emotions, sentiments and other extraneous forces at work. This has made it difficult for the media to truly float its own programme and agenda.

In recent times the Nigerian media tended to pose inherent dangers to national security in connection with politics, religion, ethnicity, power and revenue sharing which are crucial to a stable and enduring democracy. On the political sphere newsmen are expected to report about the activities of the politicians and are expected to feed the public with objective information. The newsmen are expected to nose around for information beyond the ovation at political rallies. The media are
expected to reflect balanced views of the opposing party. But most media houses do focus attention mostly on the ruling and bigger parties to the detriment of the smaller ones. While newsmen are not expected to be public relation officers to party, some chief executive of media houses often take side with political parties (The Monitor, Tue, Feb. 18, 2003, 26)

Although politicians employ the newsmen to give them publicity, the newsmen are expected by the members of the public to do what is right. However, some newsmen are victim of self-censorship by reframing from publishing certain information for fear of been queried or been sacked by his employers even when the employer has not told him not to publish such information fear needless fear could, therefore, kill the creativity in journalism. The media could constitute a threat to security where it collaborates with the political and bourgeoisie class to further marginalize and exploit the citizenry.

Indeed, the media is expected to play the watchdog role of the five ‘W’s’ and ‘H’ i.e. what, who, where, when and how. The media is expected to keep the electorates abreast of events to ensure free and fair elections. However, the Nigerian media has not done well in political coverage because of political cleavages and by proprietorial inclinations. Sadly, the level of coverage given to a particular event by Nigerian media practitioners is determined by the amount of money channeled to a particular media by a sponsor. For instance private media houses give more coverage to political parties that pay for adverts which make it difficult for media houses to divorce themselves from partisanship. (The Monitor, Tue, Feb. 18, 2003, 26)

Consequently, the reporters’ faces a dual problem of objectivity allegiance to his employer. Okoye rightly noted that:

In the original journalistic sense: objectivity required that the journalist kept himself out of his report by not injecting his emotion, personal opinion and bias into the news report. But this is very difficult, if not impossible. Since journalist may be required to offer interpretation and explanation of the issues they write about, they may consciously or unconsciously inject their own personal opinions and understanding of the issue. In fact, if the mass media should pursue objectivity at all cost, the media audience will be short-chaged (Okoye, 2002: 152).

No journalist with empty stomach can be trusted with objective reporting especially when he is not been paid his salary for months; he is, therefore, ill-equipped for the job and yet there is no benefit of long service or security of job (The Monitor, Tue, Feb. 18, 2003, 26). The outcome of media collaboration with the political and bourgeois class is that the mass majority of the citizenry are marginalized and exploited. This causes a serious problem of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, diseases, which have brought about the incidence of armed robbery and other violent crimes, youth militarism, ethnic, chauvinism, religious bigotry. Media professionals have indulged in self aggrandizement.

Similarly, publishers in Nigeria or media proprietors remain in business collaborating with the political class and by revenue generated from cover price of their titles and advertisement. To make more sales and remain in business in the face of kin competition most media use headlines and publish stories that would attract public attention. Recently, in order to broaden their revenue base,
Publishers are seeking new ways of revenue generation as they are finding it difficult to operate successfully in view of declining circulation sales, the poor income and general reading habit of Nigerians. (Marketing Edge Nov/Dec 2008: 65)

The media is supposed to assist the government of the day in publishing its activities but it has been the case of he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Political correspondence and editors of titles are often under the influence of politicians. The media has not been able to fully check the excesses of society. There have been series of cases of media compromise either with the business, political or civil populace. This compromise inhibits media freedom as there is tendency for the media to be colored by emotions and sentiments. The Nigerian media has therefore, largely been a comprador as it has to rely on sponsoring of programmes and activities.

Sequel to the above, recent technological innovations in television broadcast have caused worry in the minds of some Nigerians. Television commercials of one country are now found in other nations. Such commercials create a thirst for consumer goods from abroad and threatens the nation’s culture antiquity. It also provides unfair competition to local industries. Messages fed into television commercials across national boundaries are not censored. National security is threatened by mass media as the media is increasingly internationalized in content. Developing countries are expressing concern about the possible negative impact of the media on their cultural uniqueness. (Akpan, in Akinfeleye 2003: 23-4)

Consequently, the incidence of armed robbery and other violent crimes are on the increase in Nigeria. The daily newspapers are awash with reports of armed robbery and other forms of crime including corruption by public office holders. Although crime is ascribed to varied causes, generally, it is agreed that societal values are the common cause of crimes in society. Some have argued that crime reflects the character of a people. (Gambo, in Akinfeleye, 2003: 14). Nigeria could advance her cultural and technological heritage if it could instill national consciousness on its citizens via the media and an ideology or a belief system which a political party utilizes as a way of mobilizing people. The media is capable of mobilizing people to achieve the desired objective of the state. This view is articulated by Nzimiro:

Mobilizing of people through ideological exposure implies their political education into the socio-cultural factors which govern their behaviour to produce in them a sense of pride in themselves and patriotism for the collective good as well as a belief that they are capable of mastering their own destiny by controlling nature and organizing themselves. (Nzimiro, in Akinfeleye 2003: 31)

Unfortunately however, the media which ought to be a major stake holder in ensuring the security of the state sometimes trivialize this very sensitive issue as stated by Wali:

The Nigerian press is yet to grow in maturity. Issues that affects the general well-being of the people of the country but which can cause disaffection and disunity should be de-emphasized or played down. The reverse has
been the case in many Nigerian publications wishing to make quick sales on the platform of sensationalism and journalist scoops. (Wali, 2003:69)

The media could serve as a threat to security by way of espionage, by which a nation, organization or individuals employ to procure information concerning the interest of another country to which they are not, by law entitled. The information sought pertains to the secret affairs of the target country in strategic areas including military, industries, politics, technology etc for hostile purpose. Other forms of threat to security include propaganda, tourism, subversion, sabotage, insurgency, guerilla warfare. (Wali, 2003: 78-91)

By and large, state security operatives in particular during the military regimes constituted a security threat to media practitioners because the military is dictatorial in nature and feared that a liberal attitude towards the would bring down their regime. If the media was given free hand to operate the public could be sensitized about the dictatorial nature of the military and consequent uprising. Although, sometimes the media could be divided according to the ownership interest but during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida the media were unanimous in raising constructive criticisms about the regime and eventually succeeded in ousting the regime (Ududo & Asak 2008: 8).

The media was divided in favour of the General Abacha administration as the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) group called for ‘just a democracy. A section of the media consistently pressed on for a return to democracy. Thanks to Tell Magazine and other media for their persistence in highlighting the misdeeds of the dictatorship. More than any time in Nigeria the power of the media depicted a multi-directional force. The force contributed to the emergence of strong regional groupings. It must be mentioned that the section of the press that was pro-democratic contributed a great deal in installing the Nigerian fourth republic in 1999 (Ududo & Asak 2008: 8).

Nigerians and Nigerian Journalist in particular suffered insecurity of arbitrary arrest and detention under the obnoxious Decree 2 in the days of military rule. Decree 2 and several other decrees and edicts were promulgated by the military that violated, restricted or hindered the fundamental human rights of the citizens. For instance on October 10, 1997, security agents attached to the government house in Kaduna arrested the Kaduna state correspondent of the News and Tempo Magazine, Henry Ugbohue, he was taken to the Government House, tortured and detained for several hours. Upon his release he was hospitalized and treated for injuries sustained during the torture. No official reason was given for the action of the agents (CRP, 1998: 94). The Decrees and Edicts ousted the jurisdiction of the court in determining civil and criminal matters. The press fought tenaciously against such unlawful and unconstitutional edicts by its publications and its criticisms of the system and its operators.

The Nigerian media could be said to have performed creditably well in enthroning the current democracy and dethroning the military from the ruling the country (in the days referred to the dark days of Nigeria). The federal military government had no regard for the constitution. The action of the military regimes in Nigeria negated the very essence of the constitution and other efforts at installing an enduring democratic institution.
Conclusion
The study has discussed the role of the media in national security in Nigeria from 1960 to 1999. It has shown that from the beginning the Nigerian media was rocked by problems of interference in the discharge of its duties. These problems include that of ownership interest, political interference, military dictatorship, proliferation of media houses and ownership interest. These problems tended to overwhelmingly have control on the media and hindered it from the objectivity it should pursue. The study show that some of the national security problems created by the media are; cultural insecurity, cultural invasion, the craze for western entertainment, government secrecy and national security. The study argued that newspaper orientation in Nigeria shifted towards reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to national unity and integration. This in itself is a threat to security. Media reports greatly heightened tension since Nigeria’s independence. On the whole, the media contributed more than any other sector to restoring the current democracy in Nigeria.

This chapter has discussed objectivity in journalism which is the greatest challenge of a Journalist. The Journalist engage in the duty of information gathering, processing, storing and dissemination. Because of his role as information disseminator the Journalist becomes a gate keeper and a watch dog. The Journalist occupies the position of the 4th Estate of the realm. The role played by the media is indispensable in a democracy. Therefore the media is looked upon as a great contributor to state building. However, the media is blamed for collaborating with politicians and the rich in their quest for money, power and fame. This is where the media becomes a threat to society.

The chapter argues that the Journalist can not be blamed for doing what they are doing because all things being equal they have to survive. Therefore they must obey the rule that he who pay the piper dictates the tune. The chapter blames the Nigerian media for allowing the amount of money paid by a sponsor to dictate what is to be published.

Although the study blames the mass media for allowing the amount of money paid by a sponsor to dictate what is to be published, it exonerates them because all things being equal the Journalist have to survive. Therefore they must obey the rule that he who pays the piper dictates the tune.

Recommendations
It is in the light of this study that it is recommended that security operatives should work with media practitioners as watch dogs.

The media should rise to their expectation and use their power judiciously or else national security will continue to be threatened.

Newsmen are expected to feed the public with information capable of promoting peace and development. Government is after national interest or public interest and on their part to hear positive information or news favourable to them from the media who are expected to promote harmony and safety of their environment.
References


The Monitor Newspaper, Tuesday, February. 18, 2003,

Marketing Edge Magazine, Nov/Dec 2008: