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Rivers: Politics And The Challenges Of Insecurity

Anayo Onukwugha

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Few days ago, security operatives raided some parts of Rivers State, including Buguma, the headquarters of Asari-Toru local government area, apparently in search of arms and ammunition.

Although, the Rivers State Police Command said it was aware of the raid, which was carried out by a joint team of operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the Anti-Cultism Unit, and the Police Mobile Force (PMF) 19 and 56, the Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) in the state, Ahmad Kadiya Muhammad, refused to give details of the raid.

However, few hours after the raid, members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Asari-Toru local government area, staged a peaceful protest to the Divisional Police headquarters in Buguma, as well as to the Palace of the Amanyabo of Kalabari Kingdom, King Theophilus Princewill, where they accused leaders of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the area of attempting to eliminate the caretaker committee chairman of the area, Sobomabo Jackrich, popularly known as 'Egberi Papa.'

Commenting on his Facebook wall, a chieftain of the PDP in the area, Mr. Tubotamubo Dick, alleged that loyalists of an APC chieftain, Ojukaye Flag-Amachree, accompanied some masked gunmen who came to assassinate Jackrich, adding that the masked gunmen raided the caretaker committee chairman's houses in Buguma, and Usokun, in Degema local government area of the state. Collaborating Dick's comment on the Facebook wall, another chieftain of the PDP in Asari-Toru local government area, Hon. Enemi Alabo-George, alleged that the gunmen, who were dressed in military camouflage, moved to residences of Jackrich in Buguma and Degema, opened fire and arrested some persons.

Alabo-George, in a statement made available to newsmen in Port Harcourt, said, "I woke up this morning to the disturbing news of frantic attempts to resurrect violence in my constituency and the entire Asari-Toru local government area, by some evil men, who have long been rejected by the people.

"I am told that gun men suspected to be thugs of the APC, dressed in military camouflage invaded Buguma, in which we had just celebrated Christmas and New Year peacefully, and also enjoyed peace and tranquil, brought to bear by the strong strides and tireless efforts of many of us, who have sworn to keep our communities peaceful, as a duty we owe our people.

"It has been confirmed to me that armed men arrived residences of the L.G.A chairman, Mr. Sobomabo Jackrich, both in Buguma and Degema, opened fire on everything that met their eyes, destroyed property and took away people, whose whereabouts are still unknown. They also visited his hotel, which was commissioned just a few days ago, shot rapidly within the facility, tore the place in pieces, and took away staff. The whereabouts of the chairman is not known as I write.

They did not stop there. They visited other residences of top PDP stalwarts in the local government, caused mayhem, took away over 20 people, most of who are now feared dead, as blood trails were left all over.

When they were done with Asari-Toru, they moved on to Abonemma, to do the same, but were immediately resisted by the people who had gotten wind of their plans."

What is even more worrisome is that these were carried out under the watch of various security personnel who are permanently stationed to watch over the communities. Was this a planned and deliberate orchestration with those who should watch over us?

But, the police, in a statement issued from the Force Headquarters, Abuja, confirmed the raid in the residence of Jackrich in Buguma, and the arrest of 35 persons who are currently undergoing interrogation, as well as the recovery of about 600 Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) permanent voter's cards.

The statement further said the Police operatives also recovered one AK-47 rifle, 70 rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition, 11 cartridges and two axes.

The statement reads in part, "On 6th January at 4am, a combined team of Police personnel drawn from SARS, anti-cultism unit, 19 PMF and 56 PMF in Rivers State conducted a raid at a notorious criminal hide-out in Buguma Village.

"On getting to the residence of an ex-militant, Sobomabo Jackrichs of the aforementioned address, one (1) AK-47 rifle, seventy (70) rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition, eleven (11) cartridges, two (2) battle axes and six hundred (600) suspected stolen voters cards were recovered while thirty-five (35) suspects were arrested. Suspects to undergo screening/interrogation."

The allegation by the PDP chieftains in Asari-Toru local government area of the state, was countered by a group, the Association of Rivers State Professionals (ARSP), which urged them not to politicise efforts by security agents to make the state safe for all.

The report, which described the raid by security operatives in the three different locations in the state as a well-planned development, said

The group, which described the raid by security operatives in the three different locations in the state as a welcomed development, said it will help in arresting the deteriorating security situation in the state.

ARSP, in a statement issued in Port Harcourt by its publicity secretary, Chidugam Dimkpa, applauded the security operatives for undertaking robust pre-emptive raids on identified security dark spots and known cultists, kidnappers, armed robbers and other dangerous criminals in the state.

The statement reads in parts, "Particularly, ARSP welcomes Wednesday's security operations in Abuja Estate Waterside in Port Harcourt where criminals engaged operatives of the Nigerian Army in gun duel at the end of which various arms and ammunitions were recovered from the criminals.

"They include 5 AK 47 Rifles, 13 Magazines loaded with live ammunitions while 8 of the criminals fell to the superior firepower of the military and others escaped.

"Similarly, based on intelligence reports, men of the State Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) Wednesday raided a location in Usokun in Degema and over 6 locations in Buguma reportedly belonging to the Caretaker Chairman of Asari-Toru local government, Mr.Soboma Jackreece alias Egberi Papa, where SARS operatives came under heavy gun fire by his boys.

"After the duel, a SARS operative (policeman) was critically injured and is receiving treatment while 36 of the criminals were arrested, various arms and ammunition recovered. Also recovered were 669 Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs) believed to have been snatched from INEC officials by Egberi Papa's boys before the 2015 general election."

The security situation in the state, which recently included assassination attempts on lives of prominent political figures in the state, has led to loud outcry, especially from the leadership of the two major political parties, the PDP and the APC.

In the month of December last year, a chieftain of the APC and one-time chairman of Ohio/Akpor local government area of the state, Chikaodi Dike, escaped assassination while his police orderly was killed by the assassins at his residence in Port Harcourt.

Barely 12 hours before the incident, a chieftain of the PDP, Jerry Needam narrowly escaped assassination as gunmen, who invaded his residence in Port Harcourt, the state capital, killed three policemen, including an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) that responded to his distress call.

According to Needam, who is the special adviser on Media and Publicity to the PDP chairman, his private security guard, who was wounded during the gun battle is currently receiving medical attention in a private hospital in Port Harcourt, adding that the recent invasion and attempt on his life by the gunmen was the third in the past 18 months.

He stated that the daredevil men stormed his residence in the wee hours and shot sporadically for over two hours to gain entrance into the compound, before the arrival of the policemen, who engaged the gun men in a fierce gun battle.

Needam insisted that the mastermind of the kidnap and assassination attempt were his political opponents who desperately want him silenced following his strong political views and his penchant for speaking the truth.

Also, in October last year, Ogunabo Inko-Tariah, the former special adviser on Media and Publicity to Governor Ezeunwo Nyesom Wike, escaped assassination in his home-town, Buguma, when unknown gunmen riddled his sport utility vehicle (SUV) with bullet.

Narrating his experience, Inko-Tariah, who resigned from the Wike's government shortly after the Governorship Election Petition Tribunal annulled the governor's election, said the volleys of gunshots smashed one of the windscreens of the car, adding that while the shooting was on, his police escort told him not to stop which he obeyed.

He said, "I am still shocked over what happened. I was completely confused. The police escort told me not to stop the car and that I should continue to move on. It was God that saved my life.

"They (gunmen) thought I was at the back of the car and that was why they targeted that point. With the tinted glasses, they had concluded that I was probably at the owner's seat.

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