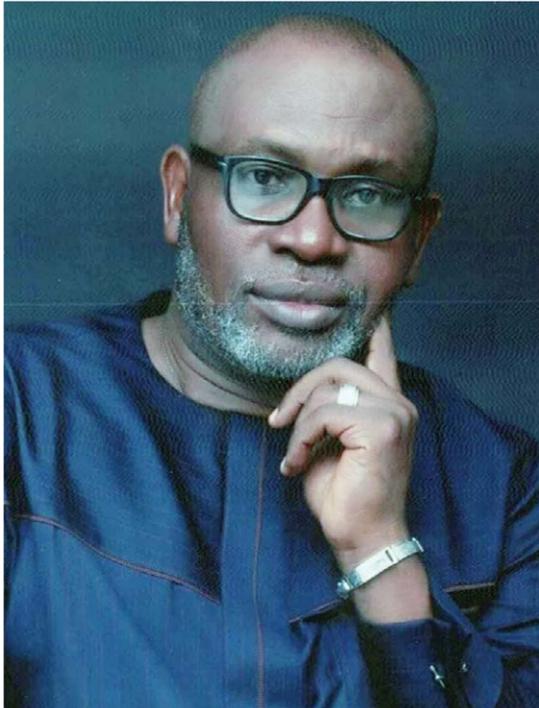


# An assessment of DSS



By **Rekpene Bassey**

Through continuous improvement and global standards, the DSS remains consequential, ensuring the safety and well-being of the nation in an ever-evolving security landscape. Imagining Nigeria without the DSS underscores its indispensable role in our collective security and stability

In the realm of elite security intelligence and law enforcement in Nigeria, the transformation from the defunct Nigeria Security Organization (NSO) to the present-day State Security Service (SSS) also known as the Department of State Services (DSS) stands as a testament to the nation's commitment to unparalleled security standards.

Originating from the Special Branch of the Nigeria Police Force, the DSS has evolved into a world-class institution with a rich history and a vital role in safeguarding the nation.

Established in 1948, the Special Branch, code-named the E Department, served as the pioneering spy and secret service wing of the police, focusing on serious crimes, civil intelligence, espionage, and counter-espionage activities. Post-colonial administrations inherited this vital department, shaping the trajectory of its evolution.

The pivotal moment occurred in 1976 when a grave breach of national security unfolded, resulting in the tragic assassination of General Murtala Ramat Mohammed. This incident prompted the visionary leadership of General Olusegun Obasanjo, successor to General Mohammed, to promulgate Decree 16, giving birth to the Nigerian Security Organisation (NSO).

Further refinements under General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986 led to the establishment of the State Security Service (SSS) through the National Security Agencies (NSA) Decree of 1986. Subsequent rebranding efforts were aimed at positioning the SSS to effectively address a myriad of national homeland security challenges.

The SSS, without a doubt, stands as one of Nigeria's most powerful official institutions. Its strength elicits curiosity, and the answers lie in a series of robust statutory provisions, including the SSS Instrument No. 1 of 1999. These provisions endow the Service with mandates comparable to renowned United States security bodies - the Secret Service, FBI, CIA, and the Police - in overlapping roles.

The SSS is statutorily authorized to execute protective services for the president and other VIPs, gather and process security intelligence, conduct counterintelligence operations, and enforce activities in criminal matters. Its responsibilities extend to safeguarding the country's integrity against espionage, subversion, terrorism, separatist agitations, intergroup conflicts, and economic crimes.

In the face of current security challenges, the Service grapples with the daunting task of effectively managing the country's integrity. Despite facing overwhelming tasks, the DSS has demonstrated competence in fulfilling its defined responsibilities, reflected in a catalogue of achievements.

Notable among these is the maintenance of peace in various parts of the country, support for democratic governance, and successful covert operations against political crises, banditry, subversion, sabotage, and terrorism.

The nature of security intelligence operations, often clandestine, leads to a lack of public acknowledgment and appreciation for the DSS's excellent

performances. This relative anonymity exposes the Service to occasional scathing public criticisms. It is essential to recognize that, like any public institution, the DSS is not exempt from imperfections.

Some criticisms levelled against the Service, such as being labelled a presidential stooge for coercion, were heightened during the 2018 siege on the National Assembly complex.

However, subsequent investigations revealed no presidential involvement, leading to the immediate dismissal of Lawal Daura, the Director-General at the time, by the then-acting President Yemi Osinbajo.

Another significant public criticism relates to the alleged disobedience of court orders, illustrated by cases involving figures like Nnamdi Kanu, Abdurashheed Bawa, and Godwin Emefiele. It is crucial to understand that, while security operates within the rule of law, exigencies sometimes necessitate actions that may override legal processes.

The Service's lack of independence from the Executive Office of the President, which can curtail its discretionary powers, adds complexity to this understanding.

An objective assessment of the DSS's achievements against these criticisms reveals that its scale of credibility outweighs its shortcomings.

The Service's accomplishments owe much to its dedicated human force, including officers and personnel who exhibit professionalism, discipline, detribalisation, and ethical cultivation. This aligns with a Service that maintains strong internal affairs and zero tolerance for indiscipline.

Given these considerations, a compelling case emerges for urgent measures to enhance the welfare of DSS officers and operatives in reflection of international benchmarks. The current personnel welfare structure, based on the consolidated paramilitary salary structure (CONPASS), is deemed austere and grossly inadequate in contemporary realities.

Re-evaluating and improving incentives for DSS officers and personnel would not only recognize their contributions but also be fitting for their challenging roles in the country's security landscape

In conclusion, a Nigeria without the DSS is a scenario that prompts contemplation. The institution, much like its dedicated personnel, has become a cornerstone in the nation's security architecture.

Through continuous improvement and global standards, the DSS remains consequential, ensuring the safety and well-being of the nation in an ever-evolving security landscape. Imagining Nigeria without the DSS underscores its indispensable role in our collective security and stability.

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