
THE EFFORTS OF NIGERIAN ARMY ON NASCENT DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In spite of the efforts made by successive military regimes towards entrenching democratic political culture, the nature of party formation and political participation by the citizens is still not ripe for the consolidation of democratic political culture. Military government or regimes are characterized with different problems ranging from suspension of the constitution, centralized administration, intolerance to opposition and criticism, they are not elected and therefore, they are not representatives of the people. The army may feel compelled to intervene in order to implement unpopular austerity policies that political elites have been unable or unwilling to undertake or to correct politically or ideologically inspired fiscal imbalances that have led the economy to the brink of collapse. The objectives of the research are to examine the nature of party formation between 1985 to 1999, and to examine the level of political participation by the citizens in consolidating democracy in Nigeria. The work seeks to answer questions on the nature of party formation from 1985 to 1999. Also, to examine possible solutions to military intervention in politics in Nigeria, the use of secondary data as sources of information for this research work was adopted. The work recommends that there should be good leadership to enhance respect for the rule of law, determination to attain and maintain self-reliance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keyword: Nascent, Democracy, Efforts, Army

INTRODUCTION

Military power adds to a country's ability to prevent national and international threat to a country. The military phenomena and Nigeria in particular did not live to this expectation because of the fact has for long been entrenched into the fabrics of the state. This was made possible because the military was then seen as an instrument of attaining statehood and also as a result of their emergence as an elite group in society. From the conservative perspective, the military is seen as a conservative force and a support base for the status-quo. Advocates of this view hinge their analysis on the professional character of the military whose values and attitudes are tied to those of the ruling class. Both are suspicious and hostile towards rapid changes as exemplified by revolutions the world over, and instead of professional conduct, the military wage suppression and reactionary actions. There is also this perspective that viewed the military as a modernized institution capable of changing societies for good in the U.S. It was the Kennedy administration that gave added impetus to the assistance of third world military elites for the modernization and stabilizing roles they performed. This led to the establishment of special counter insurgency forces to check any upsurge in communist led guerilla movement. The response of the U.S.A to the Congo crisis and that of Cuba are cases in point. A Military regime is the type of government formed by seizing state power by force in a military coup. Military government rule by Decrees and is not elected,. Democratization is the process of moving from military rule to civilian rule. This research work therefore centres on the military and democratization process in Nigeria (1985 – 1999). The Military

institution is today generally recognized as one of the marks of modern statehood. Traditionally, the role of military in any society are essentially three fold, namely, to defend the country and its citizen against an external aggression, to maintain the territorial integrity of the state and to assist the police in maintaining and restoring social order and security in the event of a serious civil disturbance. A close look at these provisions shows clearly that, unlike in the past when the main purpose of the military in society was essentially the employment of force to produce successful outcomes in war, nowadays the Armed Forces have well defined peace and war time functions in addition. With the growing changes in the environment in which states operate, the role of the military has been expanded to accommodate the noble duties of managing varied and complex challenges. Such challenges include peacekeeping operations, humanitarian operations arising from conflicts and natural and man made disasters like flood, earthquake, landslide, air crashes among others.

Also, today the military is frequently called upon to assist in the maintenance of internal security, law and order. As a result, the role of the military has now become more central to societal good and wellbeing than it ever was. Therefore, the idea and role of the military in modern society has moved from a restricted understanding as a war-fighting organization to the broader notion of employment of joint components for war, internal stabilization and peace building. For these reasons, the military as an institution of the state is a rich repository of all kinds of professions - engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, journalists, dieticians – just name it. In spite of its varied composition, the military institution is characterised by tradition, procedures and the possession of core technical competencies by its personnel imbued with disciplined character to win the nation's wars, should deterrence fail. These attributes distinguish the military, as a profession whose hallmark is the management of violence to achieve national objectives, from all other professions. How have we fared in the performance of these roles and what are our current challenges? From when it was an instrument of colonial dominance to its contemporary history, the Nigerian military has always acquitted itself with flying colours whenever duty calls. It fought along side the British Army in very important campaigns in Burma, the Cameroons and North Africa during the World War II from 1939 to 1945. Immediately after independence, the then Royal Nigerian Army was sent to the Belgian Congo to help restore peace to the young nation. Again, the Army acquitted itself very professionally with Nigeria's General JFU Agui-Ironsi eventually rising to head the UN multi-national force. Also, the Nigerian Armed Forces fought the Nigerian civil war from 1967-1970 and acquitted itself creditably in spite of its apparent unpreparedness for the war. David M. Jemibewon (1978) The immediate post war years were no less glorious. In the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the Nigerian military through the agency of the NAF, was at the forefront of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa during the colonial and apartheid era. The Air Force flew several missions ferrying arms and other logistic requirements to freedom fighters in Southern Rhodesia Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), South-West Africa (now Republic of Namibia), Angola, Mozambique and South Africa. This reach of air power truly helped Nigeria in establishing herself as a leading frontline state during liberation wars in Southern Africa.

When the crises in the West African sub-region erupted first in Liberia and later, in Sierra Leone, the Nigerian Military was once more called to action. Acting through the

instrumentality of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) composed mainly of Nigerian military personnel, peace was restored to both countries in an unprecedented peace enforcement operation. The Nigerian military has also participated creditably in several United Nations peace keeping operations in Lebanon, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan to mention a few of the more significant ones. In between these operations the Armed Forces have been called upon several times to undertake important internal security chores, from routing some insurgents in the North-East Zone, and containing religious and civil disturbances in several states of the country to containing militants in the Niger Delta. Eight military regimes succeeded, beginning in 1966, interspersed between the fourth and fifth military regime by a return to civilian rule with the Second Republic between October 1979 and December, 1983. The final military regime left power on May 29, 1999, when the current Fourth Republic was installed and the president democratically elected president.

It was under the Second Military Regime (July, 1966 To July, 1975) that some of Nigeria's major development programmes were established, such as the extensive expansion and exploitation of Nigeria's mineral resources culminating in the 'Oil Boom', which in no small measure changed the economy, the taste and living standard of many Nigerians. It was also, unfortunately, a time of war: on August 9, 1967, Nigeria declared full-scale war on "Biafra" after its forces had invaded and captured the Mid-West State. With Biafra's collapse in 1970, the region was reunited with the Federal Republic of Nigeria and a period of reconciliation and reconstruction followed. Dudley, B. (1975)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NIGERIA MILITARY

The visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Nigeria in 1956 led to the renaming of the Northern and Southern Regiments to the Queen's Own Nigerian Regiment (QONR). When later in that same year, Britain granted military autonomy to her dependencies, the Queen's Own Nigerian Regiment (QONR) was re-designated the Nigerian Military Force (NMF), and at independence in 1960, the name changed to the Royal Nigerian Army. The present designation, Nigerian Army (NA), came into use when Nigeria assumed a Republic status in 1963. Even after Nigeria had become a Republic, the Nigerian Military was still structured to implement British oriented doctrines. Though small and mainly used for ceremonial duties, after independence, the Nigerian Army (NA) was nonetheless a disciplined force. The coups-de-tat and counter coups of 1966 which culminated into the Nigerian Civil War, led the military to politics. The Nigerian Army (NA) has continued to expand in response to its mandate, growing from a force of six battalions before the Civil War to five divisions. Training has continued to improve from the simple to the complex both in content and methodology. There are now indigenous training institutions including 17 Corps Schools. The roles of the Nigerian Army (NA) have also fundamentally changed from protection of trade routes to national defence and fulfillment of international obligations in furtherance of national objectives. The military as a profession is relatively modern, but the art of warfare and the business of soldiering are as old as recorded history. This perhaps may explain why the word military has two broad usages. First as an adjective describing soldiers and the art of soldiering; and secondly, as a collective noun referring to the armed forces as a whole. It is in this second sense that the term is used in this paper. In this sense, Friedrich Engels described the military in traditional terms as "the organized association of armed men maintained by the state for the purposes of

defensive and offensive warfare". This definition does not provide an exhaustive account of all the purposes for keeping a military force by the state in a fast-changing world. This is because nowadays, the military of most states are usually employed in many other operations other than war. Therefore, I use the term "military" here to mean: The national institution primarily tasked by the Constitution with the management of violence either in defence of a country against external aggression or for the sustenance of internal cohesion and stability or for the attainment of any other national objectives as may be determined by the appropriate authority. The utility of this wider definition will become apparent when we consider the roles of the military in the state. David M. Jemibewon (1978)

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

On peculiar feature of the development of political parties in Nigeria is that the pre-existing tribal and cultural association, group, trade unions, etc., metamorphosed into political parties. Till date tribal, traditional or cultural associations or clubs, old boys associations or alumni associations, trade unions, religious bodies, etc. have acted as spring-board for the formation of political parties in Nigeria that had since the colonial era adopted multi-party system has followed the tripartite nature of Nigerian federation. Those political parties, whose formation predated political independence of Nigeria, were primarily formed in order to awaken political consciousness of the people so that they can control their affairs by achieving self government.

THE MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS

Military intervention in the political realm is viewed as a function of chronic systematic disequilibrium and of the professional characteristics of armies, the precise dimension of which may actually differ from country to country. The disequilibrium may be primarily economic in nature. The army may feel compelled to intervene in order to implement unpopular austerity policies that political elites has been unable or unwilling to undertake or to correct politically or ideologically inspired fiscal imbalances that have led the economy to the brink of collapse. Instability may also be the highly disruptive consequence of overly ambitious social mobilization drives that unleash demands and unrest as populations are torn from traditional moorings. Politicization of ethnic cleavages and intra-elite strife in governmental structures may result in political and administrative paralysis, corruption, nepotism, governmental inefficiency and tribal favouritism may also tip the legitimacy pendulum from discredited civilian elites to allegedly apolitical, untainted military hierarchies that may be trusted to provide competent national leadership Decalo (1976:7), These military coups are caused by among other factors includes one of the causes of army take –over of government in Nigerian was the regionalization of political parties. The political parties that existed in Nigeria especially during the first republic were regionally based. None of them had a broad national outlook and as a result they leaned on their various ethnic groups in order to get support. This fanning of embers of ethnic conscienceness proved injurious to the national hence, the taking over of government by the army in order to save the nation from imminent cataclysm. Momoh, A. (1994)

Desire to control the federal government, especially ethnic politics by nature, generates conflicts of varying magnitudes with consequences of different complexities. The desire

to control the centre engendered ethnic political competition because; the politicians viewed the control of the federal government by any political party as automatic control by the ethnic group where the party was rooted. This will afford them the opportunity to share and get more of the national cake. This acrimonious ethnic political competition attracted the army who acted as unbiased umpire. Tribalising and politicizing of Nigerian army in the first republic was tribalised and politicized. The army was used by the politicians to achieve what they failed to achieve through the ballot boxes. Corruption and Nepotism that pervaded the first and second republics played a major role in the military intervention in politics in Nigeria. These corruptions and nepotism took the form of looting of public treasury, parading of ill gotten wealth before the hungry and toiling masses, the appointment and promotion of civil servants and distribution of amenities based on ethnic actors, etc. The above evils prepared the stage and acted as open invitation for military intervention in Nigerian body-polity. Inflation of Population in May 1962 and November 1963 censuses in Nigeria nearly disintegrated the country as a result of the inflation of population of different areas by the politicians. They did this because; the population was used in the constituency delimitation and allocation of revenue to different regions. The competing civilian ruling classes under the cloak of ethnicity perceive consolidation of power as deriving from large population of their ethnic group, hence, the intervention of politics by the army.

Creation of mid-western region was another ignitor that lit the fire that consumed the first republic via military coup. The creation of the region out of western region while other regions remained intact had political motive. It was done solely to split the votes of the political party controlling the region. This caused a lot of disagreements within the rank and file of the politicians because the Action Group that was controlling the region was contenting the fact of dividing only its region. It argued that all minority areas of the federation should be created as regions at the same time. The crisis of 1962 within the Action Group that was controlling the Western Region was another catalyst that sped up military intervention of 1966. The disagreement within the high echelon of the party led to the removal of the Premier of the region, Chief S.L Akintoka by the Governor Sir Adesoji Aderemi; who appointed Chief Adegbenro as the Premier. The Premier retaliated by dismissing the Governor from office. This personality clash between the leaders of Action group, caused a lot of disturbances in the Western House of Assembly; this forced the Federal Government to declare a state of emergency in the region as the administrator. The crisis was deepened by the quick reinstatement of Chief Akintola with the help of the Federal Government. The crisis generated by the 1964 Federal election was another factor that caused military intervention of 1966 and the collapse of the first republic. The election was meant to elect members of the House of Representatives in Lagos. Before the election, all the political parties in the country merged into two polarized broad political alliances, the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) made up of the NPC, NNDP, the Mid-West Democratic Front and other minor parties and the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) comprising of NCNC, AG and other minority parties from the North. The political atmosphere in the country became tense after the December election as a result of large scale rigging during the election involving physical prevention of opponents from filling election papers, arbitrary arrests, stuffing of ballot boxes with fake papers, etc. The conflicts that arose as a result of the election invited the military to take over the government.

Western Regional Election of 1965 acted as the last straw that broke the back of the first republic. The election was a straight fight between the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), led by Chief Akintola and the UPGA. The UPGA accused NNDP of rigging the election and its supporters reacted violently by setting human beings, houses and other properties ablaze with petrol. This gave rise to disturbances with looting, arson, murder and other forms of violence as its end product. There was a total breakdown of law and order all over the Federation and since the different governments were unable to restore order in the country, the army boys intervened on January 15, 1966 coup. Expectedly, the military's foray into the political arena and the civil war that followed had serious negative consequences for the professional fabric of the military. In the first place, the civil war led to an unplanned rapid expansion of the Armed Forces to meet the demands of the escalating conflict. Training period was curtailed and many units were officered by Senior Non-Commissioned officers who were given field commissions and responsibilities sometimes higher than their level of training. While the performance of these officers was to be applauded in the circumstances, there was no doubt that command and control suffered seriously with grave consequences for professionalism. The long period of military rule - cumulatively over three decades - that followed the civil war did not help matters. During this period, the focus of the military was shifted from purely military chores to political manoeuvring as officers jostled for all kinds of political positions instead of purely military postings. As a consequence, the ethos and ethics of the profession were often abused; there was deep distrust and esprit de corps, the very foundation on which the officer corps rested, was virtually destroyed. To compound the situation, successive military governments refused or failed to make needed investments in the Armed Forces as regime security took precedence over state security. Equipment deteriorated and training suffered. The situation was so bad that General Salihu Ibrahim, a one-time Chief of Army Staff, had to lament in his valedictory speech in 1993 that "we were an Army of anything goes". Speaking on that occasion, the General articulated the ills of the system thus:

I hold the strong view that any military organization that intends to remain professional and relevant to its calling has no business meddling in the political affairs of the country. It is an open secret that some officers openly preferred political appointments to regimental appointments, no matter the relevance of such appointments to their careers this political interest group, even though small in number, constituted them into a very powerful pressure group, the end result was the visible decline in professionalism, morale and discipline in the Nigerian Army. We became an army where subordinate officers would not only be contemptuous of their superiors, but would exhibit total disregard to legitimate instructions by such superiors. That was the situation when the new civilian dispensation took over the reigns of power on May 29 1999. Clearly, this development was bound to affect the capacity of the military to perform credibly as a fighting force. Above all, it portended grave danger for the nascent democracy if nothing was done. To reverse the situation, the government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, initiated a programme of re-professionalisation of the Armed Forces. (Johnson Ugoji Anayaele: 2003)

DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS UNDER GENERAL IBRAHIM BABANGIDA'S REGIME (1985 - 1993)

The clamour for civilian administration in Nigeria necessitated the formation of a political association. To facilitate this transition, Government introduced the Electoral College and inaugurated the National Election Commission Chairmanned by Professor H.N. Nwosu to register political parties and organize elections. In August 1985 President Babangida promised to return the country to civilian rule by 1990; this date was later extended until January 1993. In early 1989, a constituent assembly completed work on a constitution for the Third Republic. In the spring of 1989, political activity was again permitted. In October 1989 the government established two "grassroots" parties: the National Republican Convention (NRC), which was to be "a little to the right," and the Social Democratic (SDP), "a little to the left." Other parties were not allowed to register by the Babangida government. In December 1990 the first stage of partisan elections was held at the local government level. While turnout was low, there was no violence, and both parties demonstrated strength in all regions of the country, with the SDP winning control of a majority of local government councils. In December 1991, gubernatorial and state legislative elections were held throughout the country. Babangida decreed in December 1991 that previously banned politicians would be allowed to contest in primaries scheduled for August 1992. These were cancelled due to fraud and subsequent primaries scheduled for September also were cancelled. All announced candidates were disqualified from again standing for president once a new election format was selected. The presidential election was finally held on June 12, 1993, with the inauguration of the new president scheduled to take place August 27, 1993, the eighth anniversary of President Babangida's coming to power.

In the historic June 12, 1993 presidential elections, which most observers deemed to be Nigeria's fairest, early returns indicated that wealthy Yoruba businessman M.K.O. Abiola had won a decisive victory? However, on June 23, Babangida, using several pending lawsuits as pretence, annulled the election, throwing Nigeria into turmoil. More than 100 persons were killed in riots before Babangida agreed to hand power to an "interim government" on August 27, 1993. Babangida then attempted to renege on his decision. Without popular and military support, he was forced to hand over to Ernest Shonekan, a prominent non-partisan businessman. Shonekan was to rule until new elections, scheduled for February 1994. Although he had led Babangida's Transitional Council since early 1993, Shonekan was unable to reverse Nigeria's ever-growing economic problems or to defuse lingering political tensions

DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS UNDER GENERAL SANI ABACHA'S REGIME (1993 1998)

After the exit of the interim government, General Sani Abacha took over the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. On the assumption of office, he disbanded all the existing political parties and political structures throughout the country down to the local government level. He set up another transition programme which would hand over power to the civilians on 1st October 1998. With the lifting of ban on political activities and setting up another electoral body known as the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) under the Chairmanship of Chief Dagogo Jack, political parties of associations

were formed. Following the guideline of NECON for the registration of political parties, the following five political parties were registered:

1. Committee of National Consensus (CNC)
2. National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN)
3. United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP)
4. Grassroot Democratic Party (GDP)
5. Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN)

Election was conducted into the local government councils in December 1997 by these registered political parties. The United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) won more local government councils than the others. Before the conduct of the states and federal elections, the Head of State, General Sani Abacha dies, (Nwankwo 2002:248) His sudden death on June 8, 1998 shifted leadership of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to General Abdulsalami Abubakar on June 9, 1998.

DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS UNDER GENERAL ABDULLSALAMI ABUBAKAR REGIME (1998 1999)

The death of Abacha thrust the mental of leadership of the country to Abdullasami on June 8 1998. Been mindful his pronounce, he announce that the military will not stay in power then the necessary mined broadcast Abdullsalami call on all Nigeria to fully cooperate with him he then realized political detained, grants pardon to Obasanja and Shehu Musa he said that after all necessary consultation government has decided that the election of civilian president will be held in the first counter of 1999 the newly elected president will be sworn in to office on 29 may 1999. Indeed Abdullasami keep to his own word the transition programme (timetable) was faithfully implemented. In August 1998, the Abubakar government appointed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to conduct elections for local government councils, state legislatures and governors, the national assembly, and president. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) successfully held these elections on December 5, 1998, January 9, 1999, February 20, and February 27, 1999, respectively. For the local elections, a total of nine parties were granted provisional registration, with three fulfilling the requirements to contest the following elections. These parties were the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples Party (APP), and the predominantly Yoruba Alliance for Democracy (AD). Former military head of state Olusegun Obasanjo, freed from prison by Abubakar, ran as a civilian candidate and won the presidential election. The PRC promulgated a new constitution based largely on the suspended 1979 constitution, before the May 29, 1999 inauguration of the new civilian president. The constitution includes provisions for a bicameral legislature, the National Assembly, consisting of a 360-member House of Representatives and a 109-member Senate. The executive branch and the office of president will retain strong federal powers. The legislature and judiciary, having suffered years of neglect, must be rebuilt as institutions.

During the election his government allowed independent observer from non governmental organization with in and outside the country and from internal organization to monetary the election and Obasanjo's declared winner and was sworn in on 29, May 1999

The emergence of democracy in Nigeria on May 1999 ended 16 years of consecutive military rule. Olusegun Obasanjo inherited a country suffering economic stagnation and the deterioration of most democratic institutions. Obasanjo, a former General, was

admired for his stand against the Abacha dictatorship, his record of returning the federal government to civilian rule in 1979, and his claim to represent all Nigerians regardless of religion. (Johnson Ugoji Anayaele (2003)

CONCLUSION

The military has left an indelible negative mark on the socio-economic and political terrain of Nigeria. They have succeeded in laying waste, a lot of human and material resources. Also, the military runs the nation more as a unitary state than a federal one. Political participation is no doubt one of the important requirements of good governance, especially, as people require constant access to decision-making units and power centres in the country. Militarism has shifted participation by blocking accesses to decision-making unit. Successive military regimes in the country have pursued, variously, the extension personalization of power after intervening through the use of force and violence. The constitution suspended the executive and legislative arms of the government dissolved, political parties and association bamboozled and muzzled. In the process, the values of democracy became endangered, while authoritarianism became engendered in the country. The government is therefore seen by the people as alienation.

SUMMARY

In summary therefore, while the primary responsibility of the military is to fight and win wars; a secondary responsibility is to support the civil authority in humanitarian and peace building operations. In extreme cases where internal conflicts, natural or man made disasters threaten national security or the established order, the military may be called-in as a last resort where the primary agencies charged with such responsibilities can no longer cope. Against this consideration, the Armed Forces should be able to generate highly trained and combat ready forces to undertake a number of varied tasks in three (3) clearly distinguishable situations, namely, in peacetime, during crisis, and in war. The first remedy against future military intervention in the nation's politics is to tackle the nation's problems squarely, most especially, the problem of poverty and its offspring (such as hunger, diseases) It is safe to conclude that, but for its unfortunate detour into the political arena, the Armed Forces has acquitted itself creditably through its contributions to the sustenance of peace and security and the task of nation building and development.

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