

Democratization and the Military in Nigeria: A Case for an Enduring Civil-Military Relations in the Fourth Republic and Beyond

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Abstract

This paper examines the military and democracy within the context of Nigeria's historical and socio political reality. Nigeria's inability to foster a sustainable democratic tradition has negative consequences for the country. The quest for democracy and therefore development in Nigeria has been hindered by the disruptive influences of militarism. The military's love for power stems partially from a love for wealth and partly from its self-image as the custodian of the independent and corporate existence of the country. If the democratic tradition is to be sustained in Nigeria, constitutional as well as policy measures should be adopted to tackle the issue of militarism.

Keywords: Military intervention in Africa politics; Democracy; Democratization and military in Nigeria; Enhancing an enduring civil — Military relations fourth republic and beyond

Introduction

The military foundation of most societies would be difficult to dispute. History books are often filled with people illustration of invasions and conquest of weak communities by powerful forces. The military as an institution existed even in pre-colonial times especially in those ancient kingdom of all such as the Benin Empire, the Oyo Kingdom, Dahomey Kingdom, Borno Empire, etc.

At this time, the military was primarily assigned the responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of these states. Although, they were regularly consulted even on political matters, they had no direct control over the affairs of state. Essentially, they remained subordinated to the political authorities [1].

Even in ancient Rome, the military was not known to directly involved in governance until the point in time when the Roman Army "went beyond. Its brief to takeover power from the Roman senate and henceforth chose who the Emperor was going to be.

This abbreviation became known as PRAETORIANISM i.e. the direct intervention of the military in politics. Consequently, the military that was initially regarded as the protector of the Emperor or the praetorian guards suddenly took over power. From this moment onward military praetorians became associated with the overthrow of legitimate 'and elected government [2].

Although, the military institution is an important institution in the society that could assist in the maintenance of stability through protection of the territorial integrity of the state concerned. The unusual happens when this institution chooses to abandon its traditional responsibility and then decides to embrace the option of taking over the state power. The issue therefore, is how we keep the military permanently in the barracks in order for it to perform its traditional role as well as disengage them from politics.

This paper is structured into five parts. In section two, the conceptual clarification of the terms used in the write up was elucidated, Military intervention in politics was brought to light in Africa with particularly focus on Nigeria, the concept of democracy, democratization [3] and the military are critically examined and the fourth section deals with the imperative of enhancing, an enduring and lasting civil — military relation in the fourth Republic and beyond. The conclusion is contained in the Fifth section.

Conceptual clarification and literature review

A. Democratization: if we take democracy as being on a continuum with low democracy, medium democracy and high democracy as the closet to the democratic dead end, then in reference to Nigeria we can only speak of democratization; which is a form of low democracy tending toward medium with democratic consolidation still for fetched.

B. The military: this is one of the institution of the state assigned with the responsibility of defending the territorial integrity of the state to ward off aggression from other independent state

C. Civil-military relation: this notion connote the idea of engendering civilian control of the military as well as keeping the military in the barrack to perform their constitutional/ traditional role.

D. Fourth republic: this is the period that begin from the time the Abubakar regime disengage from office and hand —over to an elected civilian government that is, from May 29th 1999.

E. Consolidation: this is defined as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimating such that all political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that, the democratic regime is better for their society than any other realistic alternative they can imagine.

Military intervention in Africa politics

During the days of colonialism, the colonial powers needed to use military force to pacify and capture the conquered territories of Africa in the course of the arbitrary rule perspective by colonialism, military came in handy (as a useful instrument) and all through the period of colonial rule the military related to the people without civility and they were accustomed to the practice of using the language of force and intimidation [4].

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The African military came from the background of relating to the people as enemies and not as friends. Indeed, the military sees itself as been completely different from the bloody civilians'. Form this foundation, the military had perfected its strategies of subjugation of other groups, and dislodging it from governance has remained a tall agenda.

After independence many parts of Africa experienced a new lease of life because independence brought a revolution of rising expectation. It was most unexpected that military intervention was going to become part of the development crisis of the African States. The reality of this crisis began to stare Africans in the face when in 1952, a group of Army Officers in Egypt who called themselves FREE OFFICERS led by Generals Naguib and Abdul Nasser. These officers overthrow the Monarchy headed by King Farouk and subsequently, the Egyptian Army took over the reins of power which was a novelty in Africa [5].

However, like a wild fire this cankerworm soon spread to Africa south of the Sahara: By 1962, a group of Army officers in Togo overthrew the elected government of Sylvanus Olympie. Sooner than later elected government in Ghana, Nigeria, Dahomey which was later known as republic of Benin fell to the military like packs of cards. From then on what started as a little problem assumed a cancerous dimension as many more government fell in the hands of the military in many African states.

Nigeria experienced military intervention first in 1966, when the elected government of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was overthrown in 1966 by a group of young military officers. But the coup plotters were not the beneficiaries of it, they were swept aside by the senior officer and the rein of power fell to General Aguiyi-Ironsi.

Since this experience with military intervention in politics, Nigeria has been plaque with a problem that once the politicians failed, the military is confronted with one issue, how long is it to remain in power. Once it comes up with a programme or time — table of transition [6] from military to civilian rule, the other competitors for power as well as the international community expect it to adhere to this whatever its duration, it is not expected to have no end.

Prevarication on this alone could be the basis for assessing the success or otherwise of the regime. In this regard both the Murtala/Obasanjo and the Abdul- Salam Abubakar military regimes succeeded in keeping to the time frame for transition where Gowon's, Babangida's and Abacha's regimes were a failure.

With all its imperfections, Nigerians have now come to settle for even the worst form of civilian rule even if democratic rule is still a remote – possibility. Fortunately, the military has also come to the conclusion that it hardly fare better under military rule as professionalism is the first casualty. Military regimes were not willing to have a professional military that could strike with precision because of the fear of military coup. The argument then is that rather than preparing Africans for political independence, the colonial regime prepared Africans against independence [7].

Democracy, democratization and military in Nigeria (discussion and analysis)

Democracy has become a much — abused concept even as it has gained a lot of currency across the globe. Claude Ake argues that democracy has been devalued in order to make it convenient and less threatening to those in power or demanding on anyone. He argues: 'Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value [8].

While it spreads, our world is more repressive, after the cold war, there is only one power bloc whose leader act as thought might is right. There is only one ideology, liberal democracy, only one religion, market forces.'

What exactly is democracy and what is the link with the concept of good governance. Democratic theory has been mired in an unresolved conflict between two meanings.

The first conceives democracy as some kind of popular power, a kind of politics in which citizens are engaged in self — government and self-regulation. This perspective holds the view that democracy has a basic intent and objectives.

These intents such as individual liberty, equality of citizens, fundamental rights can be realized within a variety of processes. Democratic government must be dedicated to the well — being of the people who should be able to hold leaders accountable and make them (the people) express their wishes and respond to their needs [9].

The second views democracy as an aid to decision — making, that is, a means of conferring authority on those periodically voted into office. Democracy through voting aggregates interest and expresses policy preference. The emphasis here is process, those institutions and processes designed to ensure the happiness of society as a whole not triumphing on individual liberty.

These two ways of viewing democracy has led to the emergence of three models of democracy.

The first is a system of decision — making about public affairs in which citizen are directly involved. This is the original form that democracy took in the Greek city — state of Athens and is referred to as direct democracy. Direct democracy is indeed the foundation of republican government. Citizen participation is underlined by a commitment to the principle of civic virtue.

The second model is the liberal or representative democracy. This model is hinged on the fact that private property suggests the need authority in the form of a state that monopolizes the means of coercion, the need for a sovereign power to secure the basis of trade, commerce, religion and the prosperity of the family. Representative democracy was therefore the institutional structure that is devised to protect individual liberty and at the same time ensure the general welfare [10].

The third model is the one party or Marxist democracy. This model takes off from the view that the ideals of liberty, equality and justice that produce the liberation tradition could not be realized by free struggle for votes in the political systems together with the free struggle for profit in the market place. The failure of liberalism to achieve these ideals is attributed to the dynamics of capitalism that produces systematic inequality and thereby limits individual freedom.

There is also the tendency of inequality and constraints in economic production, especially in capitalist societies, to abridge the realization of justice and liberty [11].

Marx calls for a "commune structure" in which society is broken into small self — governing committees who then send their representatives to larger administrative units such as districts. The districts in turn sand their representative to the national government. This pyramid structure of delegated democracy would restore self—reliance and freedom.

In Nigeria, we have adopted the liberal model of democracy that

places emphasis on electoral competition in a high context of high inequalities (individual and group) and an authoritarian state, such that people vote without choosing, and when they close the only option is between two oppressors. Thus, the nature of the state, the ambivalent citizenship and thereby problematic civil society, coupled with poor social conditions (marked by wide spread poverty and ignorance) limit good governance and threaten democracy [12].

Liberal democracy extends beyond the minimalist or electoral democracy. In addition to regular, free and fair electoral competition and universal suffrage, it requires the absence of reserved domain of power for the military or other social and political forces that are not either directly or indirectly accountable to the electorate.

Second, in addition to the vertical accountability of rulers to the ruled (which is secured most reliably through regular, free and fair elections), it requires horizontal accountability of office — holders to one another. This constrains executive power and so helps protect constitutionalism, of law and the deliberative process.

Third, it encourages extensive provision for political and civic pluralism as well as for individual and group freedom (belief, opinion, speech, assembly etc).

Democratization entails the continuous restructuring of both state and civil society. It involves the restructuring of political institutions and the general approach to management of public affairs with an eye on efficient collective prosperity [13].

For developing countries, it implies particular conception of development management that mobilizes citizen initiative and resources by their active participation in public affairs. This can be referred to as extending the procedural model to encompassing substantive democracy.

One outcome of the democratization processes on the military is that of gain in professionalism. The social tensions and division that result from the involvement of a fraction of the military in politics should begin to disappear, more so with the retirement of the political soldiers. It is obvious that only a fraction of the armed get involved in politics and the juicy appointments that it throws up.

In any case, there are practices within the democratization processes that activate militarism and thus endanger the unfolding processes. By democracy or the absence of rigging or corruption at polling booths nor the absence of the intimidation of voters but we have in mind some respect for movement from one — party rule to multi — party democracy, from military rule to multi — party democracy and life presidency to a term — presidency.

Central to good governance is the question of development and the enhancement of general welfare of the citizen. While it was originally thought that democracy should take a back seat in the quest for development in Africa, the failure to achieve development after several decades of authoritarian rule, and military dictatorships has led to a return to the question of the relationship between development and democracy. Democracy now enjoys worldwide popularity as a key element of good governance and of promoting sustainable human development. In fact, the benefit of good governance, economic prosperity, are said to generate pressures for democratization in newly industrialized countries. For example, a people that enjoys even modest levels of prosperity, and education is unlikely to become servile. Indeed, the more means people acquire, the more likely they are to want a say in making the rules under domain of political freedom. Thus, democracy is the road to good governance, while the achievement

of good governance and its attendant economic prosperity is a bulwark for democracy.

The military institution is the offshoot of the need to secure the territorial boundaries of the state. The military is called forth by the need to enhance the safety of a nation's social, economic, and political institutions against threat arising from other independent states [14].

The first point of relevance to new democracies like Nigeria is the conflict between the military world view and culture and democratic values. The military mind upholds organization, and commends the subordination of the individual to the group. The emphasis is on hierarchy, loyalty, order, discipline and obedience.

Democracy place premium on non — conformity and freedom of thought and expression. The emphasis is on constant questioning of authority, discussion of issues and consideration of policy options that are non — violent and respectful of the lives of others. The ascendance of the military especially in times of war meant that liberal democratic values are compromised. Indeed, the military mentality is one major reason why Claude Ake argued that military rule is a negation of what is uniquely human to rule and believed that military could never engender democracy because it is an anti — thesis of democracy is regarded to its norms, values, purposes, and structure.

According to Claude Ake: the military addresses the extreme and the extra — ordinary while democracy, addresses the routine, the military values discipline, and hierarchy, democracy, freedom and equality, the military is oriented to law and order, democracy to diversity, contradiction and competition, the method of the military is violent aggression, that of democracy is persuasion, negotiation, and consensus — “building”

Two decade of military rule in Nigeria left very strong authoritarian imprint on civil life and civil society that conscious effort has to made to engineer the cultivation of civic virtue to advance democracy. This is very important to remove violence that continuous to characterize electoral competition, itself crucial to the effort to crystallize civilian of the military so long as authoritarian practices continue to pervade society, democracy will remain fragile, and the threat of military incursion into politics real [15].

Enhancing an enduring civil — military relations fourth republic and beyond (Findings)

As Luckha has noted, the military has the capacity to block expansion of the political space reverse democratization process and return mid — way. They are also able to determine the terms, conditions and character of the return to constitutional rule.

According to Huntington there are historically two types of control of the military in the west: objective or liberal and subjective or penetration control.

The objective/liberal control is best exemplified by western democracies in which there exists a clear distinct between military and civilian roles and functions.

Civilian control of the military is achieved in several ways (Findings)

In the first instance, the military is kept out of politics and thus subordinated to civilian leaders who are accountable to the people directly or through an assembly.

Secondly, while the military is required to provide input in form of

advice and as well implement defence policy, the formulation of policy in the realm of defence is to be the sole responsibility of the civilian authority.

Thirdly; there exists strict political neutrality within the military as a means of ensuring its loyalty to the government of the day, irrespective of the political party that constitutes the government.

The subjective or penetration control employs the systematic and thorough-going politicization which has been achieved in varying degree in dictatorial or one-party state. For example Hitler attempted in 1934 to turn the German Army into "political soldier". Under the institutional penetration control, civilian control of the military is maintained through a level of interpenetration between the armed forces and the party [16].

The contention that the military should be subordinated to civil authority is predicated on the premise that the military is an arm of the state and an important tool of state policy. Hence, it is to serve as an instrument of political" authorities which has the constitutional right to determine its use. However, it is difficult to achieve complete objective civilian control over the military. This is the case because of the tending of many civilian groups to see such control in subjective terms. Rather than allow the military to be neutral, dominant groups seek to subordinate the officer corps to their own interests.

The situation is even more difficult in countries like Nigeria, coming from the very antithesis of objective civilian control: military participation in politics. Until 1999, the Nigerian military was immersed in regional ethnic, institutional and constitutional politics. Specific efforts are being made to professionalize the military, re-indoctrinate it on values of subordination to civilian rules improve its capacity and give it a national apolitical outlook.

The 1999 constitution states in section 217(2c) that one of the fundamental objectives of the armed forces of Nigeria is "suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order whom called upon to do so by the president, but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an act of the Nation Assembly".

Section 218(1) similarly underscores the president's supreme and constitutional power over the military: "The powers of the president as the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces of the federation shall include bower tip determine the operation use of the Armed Forces of the federation.

Against the background of these constitutional powers and as a device for clearing up the mass that had been perpetrated by the past military regimes, that former president Olusegun Obasanjo invoked two fundamental measures: one, he retired all military officer that had held political appointments in the country between 1984 and 1999; two, he brought to trial some top military officers [17].

The rationale for purging the erstwhile political military officers was promised on the perception that all officers that served previous military regimes in various political positions might not be fully amenable to life in the barracks any longer, and could therefore disturb the efforts at re-professionalizing the military under civilian political leadership.

These appeared to be bold attempts to institutionalize civilian control of the military and re-professionalize, the armed forces they are insufficient to checkmate future military intervention in the nation's body polity. It is only good and transparent people-oriented governance that can constitute the major antidote to military incursion into politics.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The concept of democratization is the main thrust of the main. The concept makes it clear that democracy cannot be instituted by conducting an election to replace military dictators with civilians.

Rather it has to be established and gradually institutionalized through the conscious efforts of the elites and political leaders over time.

Such a process will involve political institutionalization, behavioural and attitudinal changes that normalize politics and' narrow uncertainty.

The challenge of democratization is therefore to ensure that democracy 'becomes the only game in town. It must involve a shift in political culture, a transition from instrumental to principled commitment to the democratic framework, a growth in trust and cooperation framework, a growth in trust and cooperation among then political competitors and a socialization of the general population. This can be achieved through both deliberative efforts and the practice of the democracy in politics and civil society. Democratic consolidations thus involve a shared normative and behavioural commitment to the specific rule and practice of the country's constitutional system.

The major catalyst that will comment the democratization of Nigeria and engender an enduring civil-goods transparent and viable people-oriented governance. With the increasing involvement of the retired military officers in Nigeria's democratization may well be a factor capable of discouraging military direct incursion into civil politics.

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