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# From Welcome to Hostility: An Analysis of the Change in Civil Attitude to Military Intervention in Nigerian Politics, 1966 – 1999

Emmanuel Ikechi Onah

## Abstract

*This paper examines the change in civil attitude towards military intervention in Nigeria between 1966 and 1999. Military intervention in Nigerian politics was popular at first. This popularity was based on the belief that the military would correct the socio-political ills that the First Republic had created. It was then hoped that within a short space of time, the military would move society forward. It turned out that this did not happen. As the military grappled for direction, civil attitude to the military first became indifferent. The populace increasingly lost its patience with military rule towards the end of the Babangida regime in the early 1990s through the Abacha dictatorship from 1993-1998 as their expectations failed to materialize. As military rule failed, military intervention was perceived an end in itself and an opportunity for military adventurists to seize power for personal gains. Through the content analysis of secondary materials and other related sources, this work found that by the end of the 1990s civil attitude to military intervention in politics changed to hostility. The implication of this change in civil attitude to military intervention for democratic rule in Nigeria is that no matter the challenges faced in the country under civilian rule the military is not expected to seize power. They are expected to remain within their constitutional roles of protecting the state, while politicians work out the solutions to whatever problems the country faces.*

## Introduction

On Saturday, 15 January 1966, a woman's voice announcing on Radio Nigeria, the kidnap of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance in the early hours of the morning, and their abduction to an unknown destination by a dissident section of the Nigerian Army, heralded the first ever military coup in Nigeria. Although this military action was not exactly successful as originally planned by the conspirators, it however claimed the lives of some important Nigerians.<sup>1</sup> Among them were the Prime Minister of the country, Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of the Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, his counterpart in the Western Region, Samuel Ladoke Akintola, and the first Finance Minister of the federation, Festus Okotie-Eboh. The counter-coup followed this first coup, in July 1966. The counter-coup also resulted in the

deaths of several high-ranking officers of the Nigerian Army, including the first Nigerian Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Major-General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, the first Military Governor of Western Nigeria, Lt Col Adekunle Fajuyi. The civil war that ultimately resulted from these events took the lives of millions of Nigerians.<sup>2</sup>

The above events, notwithstanding, the army remained in power and was in government from 1966 to 1979, and from 1983 to 1999. In fact, of the first fifty years of the country's independence, the army was in power for about twenty-nine years. After leading the country through the civil war, the army continued in government through several coups that produced different regimes. At first, following the initial disappointments of the early independence years, the masses of Nigeria welcomed the military into the political arena with open hands and applause. Eventually however, civil attitude to the military in Nigerian politics became hostile.

It is the change in the civil attitude towards military intervention in Nigerian politics that this paper seeks to study. The paper traces the trajectory of military rule in the Nigeria and tries to locate the point at which the civil attitude changed and the process that led to this change. Finally, the paper attempts an analysis of the implications of this change in civil attitude to military intervention for democratic rule in Nigeria, as well as makes a number of recommendations for the way forward in Nigerian politics.

### Theoretical Analysis

At independence, the military in Nigeria was thought to be removed from politics and was expected to be apolitical. These expectations were based on the tradition that the Nigerian military inherited from its forerunner, the Royal West Africa Frontier Force, which was established on Western ideals. These ideals spelt out the role of the military as that of a passive instrument in the hands of the government for the protection and defence of the territorial integrity of the country.<sup>3</sup> By January 1966, however, these expectations proved otherwise. The Nigerian soldier made a violent transition from the defender of the nation to its ruler.<sup>4</sup> Events in Nigeria were similar to elsewhere in Africa in the 1960s and early 1970s, where the military appeared to be on rampage, taking over governments in most countries on the continent with careless abandon and offering almost the same reasons<sup>5</sup>. Within a few years, the phenomenon became the norm, such that in the three-month period between November 1965 and February 1966, there were 12 successful coups in Africa.<sup>6</sup>

This paper utilizes as its analytical framework, two theories of military intervention in Third World politics. The first of these theories is propounded by Huntington, who argues that military intervention in third world politics is due to environmental factors or the features of particular societies. Huntington identifies the particular societal characteristics under

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which the military operates to include the absence of effective political institutions, the fragmentation of power, weakness of authority, politicization of social factors and institutions, as well as the politicization of the military and the prevalence of violence in the society.<sup>7</sup> It is the presence of these factors that enables the military in a given Third World country to intervene in politics and take over power.

The arguments of this theory tallies with the reasons the military usually gave for their interventions, which mostly bothered on the failure of democracy in the respective countries after independence. Independence was achieved with very high hopes that the countries would shortly achieve positive transformation in public infrastructure, individual welfare, social progress and national development.<sup>8</sup> These expectations however did not materialize. It soon became obvious that the political leaders of the respective countries were not going to fulfil the promise of independence. Once these leaders failed, disillusionment became the lot of the people.<sup>9</sup> The military actually only took advantage of the widespread hopelessness to intervene in politics.

The second theoretical framework of this paper is the argument that the military intervenes in Third World politics due to the internal structure of military organization in the countries, as propounded by Janowitz, who argues that certain characteristics of the military in the new states such as the military organizational format and technology, training and professionalism, internal cohesion and esprit de corps, and the monopoly of force, provide enough motivations for the military to intervene in the political arena<sup>10</sup>. Initially, these characteristics gave the military an edge in their dealings with politicians in the various countries and enabled them to ultimately take power in the countries. This second theory also helps us to explain the later practice of the military, which eventually started conducting coups against themselves.

After the specialized characteristics of the military enabled them to displace the politicians from power, in later years, it was the breakdown of these characteristics that enabled elements of the military to move against other elements of the military in power, as factions arose in the military, each wanting to taste power. This love for power eventually became an end in itself and the objective of governance became relegated. As Elagwu noted, "after experiencing political dis-virginity in January 1966, the Nigerian Military (engaged) in political promiscuity. It (became) a predatory institution imploding with reckless abandon into the political arena, thus rendering extremely fragile, the boundaries between the ballot box and the barracks."<sup>11</sup>

With this 'promiscuity', this impunity, it was no wonder that the military eventually failed to sustainably address the problems of the country that they initially came into politics to address. As Tyoden argued, "the Nigerian military (became) subject to the vicissitudes of the Nigerian

society just as any social institution within the country. Developments within the Nigerian society cannot but be reflected and have repercussions in the Nigerian military<sup>12</sup>. In fact, as late as 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida, former military President of the country and one of the most prominent players in the military's adventure into Nigerian politics admitted, "events today indicate that most of the reasons which justified the take-over of government from the civilians, still persist"<sup>13</sup>. It was this continued persistence of the problems of the country despite the long years of military rule that contributed immensely to the eventual change in civil attitude to military intervention in Nigerian politics from welcome to hostility.

### Civil Attitude to the post-First Republic Coups: The January 1966 Coup and the July 1966 Counter-Coup

The very first coup to take place in Nigeria occurred on January 15 1966. It was organized by a core of three junior army officers, namely Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Adewale Ademoyega and Emmanuel Ifeajuna<sup>14</sup>. Active preparations for the coup started in July 1965. Prior to that period, the Nigerian political horizon was very disturbed. The 1964 federal elections had ended in stalemate, and in the North where the results were accepted, rigging was the order of the day. Preparations for the elections in the West rescheduled for 1965 already gave indications of what would come from the start. The elections expectedly turned ugly<sup>15</sup>. At the general societal level, corruption and greed had rendered the hopes of independence clearly unrealizable. After the disturbances that accompanied the 1965 elections in the West had provided a final reason for action therefore, the coup plotters struck<sup>16</sup>.

However, their action was a failure, at least going by what was said to be the original plan of the conspirators. In Enugu and Benin, for instance, the coup failed woefully. In Kaduna however, it went according to plan. The coup leader there, Major Nzeogwu made an announcement that gave an insight into the agenda of the conspirators:

...Like good soldiers, we are not promising anything miraculous or spectacular. But what we do promise every law-abiding citizen is freedom from fear and all forms of oppression, freedom from general inefficiency and freedom to live and strive in every field of human endeavour, both nationally and internationally. We promise that you will no more be ashamed to say that you are Nigerians.<sup>17</sup>

In Lagos, there was an initial period of confusion following the abduction and eventual killing of the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. But as the coup got underway and the news spread, there was wide jubilation at the toppling of the First Republic, a Republic that was already very unpopular among the citizens of the country. Summarizing the

mood of the moment in its August 1967 edition, the *Newswatch* Nigeria newspaper, leaders of the incident

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mood of the moment, *Spear*, the authoritative magazine at the time, wrote in its August 1967 edition, "the January 1966 revolt or 'coup' seemed to have been generally well received among the people"<sup>18</sup>. The Northern Nigeria newspaper, the *New Nigerian*, wrote glowingly of one of the leaders of the incident:

Major C. K. Nzeogwu, the military commander in Kaduna will not be 28 years of age until next month. This young slim, rather good looking officer, who now finds himself the focus of world attention had slept at his desk for the past three nights... He is well known to many people in Kaduna where he went to school. He is remembered as a brilliant student and even at school a person of passionately independent news<sup>19</sup>.

As the confusion in Lagos cleared, however, it became clear that the coup had finally failed. It was thus the supreme commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Major General Ironsi who eventually received the reins of power, while Nzeogwu and his co-conspirators were taken into detention. Ironsi, who became the new Head of State, rode upon the crest of popularity that greeted the coup. The *Daily Times*, in its front-page comment on January 16, 1966, was in a jubilant mood:

today there is a new regime in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, a new military regime. About time too. The new administration deserves praise for the calm manner it effected the change, without causing public panic. Something just had to be done to save the federation, something has been done. It is like a surgical operation which must be performed or the patient dies. The operation has been performed. It has proved successful. And it is welcome.<sup>20</sup>

General Ironsi, however mismanaged the regime. His promulgation of Decree 34, which turned the country into a unitary state, was not well received across the country. His actions were also interpreted to be ethnic and partisan. Coupled with the later interpretation in certain parts of the country of the January 15 coup of 1966 as an ethnically inspired Igbo affair<sup>21</sup>, the Ironsi regime was overthrown in a counter-coup on July 29 1966, and was replaced by that of then Lt Col Yakubu Gowon. The events that accompanied this change, including the pogroms in the North and the Civil War, are already well documented<sup>22</sup>. None of these events detracted however, from the immense popularity which military regimes enjoyed at this time among the citizenry. Military regimes were still largely seen as stabilizing and cleansing agents in the nation's politics. It was this popularity that General Gowon subsequently harnessed to mobilize the

efforts that enabled the Nigerian military to win the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1967-70.<sup>23</sup>

### Civil Attitude to the Murtala Muhammed Coup of 1975

At the end of the civil war in 1970, General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of State, among other things, promised to hand-over to a democratically elected Government in 1976. This promise coupled with his post-war policies of the 3-Rs- reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, helped to endear the military administration to the people. By 1975 however, cracks had appeared in the implementation of the administration's major programmes. There were loud grumbles about corruption which many argued had reached abnormal levels. Some high government officials assumed emergency powers, which enabled them to detain citizens without recourse to the courts. Inflation was rampant as a result of the Udoji salary awards to workers. But the one issue which finally broke the back of the administration was its reneging on the promised hand over to politicians.

At the beginning of 1975, there was no sign yet of the planned hand-over. Brigadier G.S. Jallo, then Commander of the Nigerian Defence Academy had earlier maintained that party politics should not be lifted and that the military should remain in power for another five to ten years<sup>24</sup>. Thereafter, General David Ejoor, who was then the Chief of Staff of the Army reiterated that "the Federal Military Government will not quit power by 1975 no matter what amount of pressure is brought to bear on the government"<sup>25</sup>. There was a great deal of disquiet in the land for some time. In an interview with *New Nigerian* of 2 June 1975, Shehu Shagari, who was then the Federal Commissioner for Finance, called on the military to "set in motion some basic democratic machinery as signposts towards handing over government to the people"<sup>26</sup>. The administration then opened up. The then Federal Commissioner for Information, Mr. Edwin Clark, explained why the military government must have to stay on, and it became very clear that General Gowon would not hand-over as promised.<sup>27</sup>

It was in the midst of the agitations for the fulfilment of the hand-over promise, that General Murtala Mohammed took over power in a coup on 29 July 1975. According to Colonel Joseph Garba who announced the coup, it was carried out because of "what has been happening in our country in the past few months"<sup>28</sup>. General Mohammed in his maiden broadcast elaborated further: "the leadership either by design or default had become too insensitive to the true feelings and yearnings of the people"<sup>29</sup>. He then promised among other things to review the political programme. In an opinion poll conducted by the *Sunday Sketch* on 3 August 1975, respondents heartily welcomed the new administration. Professor Bolaji Akinyemi, one of the respondents, said the coup could not have come as a surprise to anybody, as over the past two years, many problems had mounted but the regime showed a lack of will to tackle them. Mr. P. Onyeghagwu commented that the new government was



welcome, but it had to solve most of the nation's social problems and address some of the social ills. Bisi Olagbaju remarked that the new government had a duty to try to correct the faults of past governments<sup>30</sup>.

Murtala Mohammed went on to justify the public enthusiasm at the inception of his regime. In an editorial titled, '30 days of revolution', commemorating Murtala's first month in office, the *Daily Times* of 27 August 1975 wrote, "the country is breathing again. In the last 30 days a new lease of life has been breathed into our nation's body politic. In the last 30 days, we have all witnessed what we all thought was impossible: a revolution that injected powerful impetus into our blood system". The paper went on to point out that all these were possible because the country now had a military administration that intended to carry out its programme of economic, social and political activities with maximum dispatch. "So far so good, and in the last 30 days, the new administration, because of the popular measures it has been executing, has been riding the wave of public optimism"<sup>31</sup>.

In many ways, the administration conformed to popular notions of what a responsive government should be- military dispatch, responsiveness, openness and military discipline. Unfortunately, General Murtala Mohammed was killed in an abortive coup on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1979 by a group of coup plotters whose legacy, apart from those dastardly killings, was the imposition of curfew "from dawn to dusk!"<sup>32</sup> It now fell on the shoulders of General Olusegun Obasanjo who took over, to guide the administration through their many laudable programmes, including the return to civil rule, which General Obasanjo creditably did on October 1, 1979.

#### **Civil Attitude to the post-Second Republic Coups: The Buhari Coup of December 1983**

Alhaji Shehu Shagari came to the presidency of the country in October 1979, riding on the high saddle of three promises, clearly outlined in his party's manifesto, that he would "provide Nigeria with food, shelter and qualitative education". When he completed the first four years of his stewardship however, not only were these promises not fulfilled but worse, the nation's economy had embarked on a terrible nose-dive towards the abyss of catastrophe<sup>33</sup>, and the President lost the confidence of the people.<sup>34</sup> In 1983 when new elections were held, there was massive rigging across the country. Yet, President Shagari was declared re-elected and then sworn in for another four-year term. It did not therefore come as a surprise when on the 31 December 1983 the military staged a comeback in yet another coup. On the morning of that day, coup spokesman, Brigadier Sani Abacha gave the reasons for the toppling of the Second Republic as:

the harsh intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We

have become a debtor and beggar nation. There is inadequacy of food at reasonable prices for our people. Health services are in shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment. Our educational system is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Unemployment figures, including the graduates, have reached embarrassing and unacceptable proportions. In some states, workers are being owed salary arrears of eight to twelve months and in others, there are threats of salary cuts, yet our leaders revel in squandermania, corruption and indiscipline.<sup>35</sup>

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General Mohammadu Buhari, who eventually inherited the mantle of leadership, in his maiden speech elaborated on the above thesis. According to him, the reasons for the military take-over were broadly due to the nature of politics since 1979, the mismanagement of the economy, corruption and indiscipline, and the realities of the 1983 elections.<sup>36</sup>

Public reaction was spontaneous and positive, so much that in later speeches, top military officers thanked the masses for their obvious solidarity with the action<sup>37</sup>. Everywhere across the country, crowds of jubilating citizens welcomed the military take-over. Most people interviewed by *Sunday Tribune* newspaper on 1 January 1984 in the old Gongola State (now comprising Adamawa and Taraba states) on 2 January 1984, said the change of government was overdue. The paper further reported that in Kwara State, residents trooped out early to the streets with shouts of *Ayo ni o*, which reads 'this is good tidings.' Many of these residents later visited the beer parlours to rejoice over the exit of the civilian government<sup>38</sup>. Elsewhere across the country, the story was the same. In his own comments to the *Daily Times* newspaper at the time, Professor Olatunde Oloko of the Sociology Department, University of Lagos saw the change as something that was inevitable and desirable.<sup>39</sup>

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**The Babangida Coup of 1985**

Despite the wave of public enthusiasm that welcomed the Buhari regime, it did not last. Buhari had on assumption of office realized the enormity of problems left behind by the erstwhile civilian administration. It was thus understandable when high officials of that regime went into action with a seriousness that could even be discerned from the looks on their faces. But as time went on, it became clear that it could actually be stubbornness and inflexibility that were written on those faces. Increasingly, grumbles of inaccessibility were being heard even from highly placed officials of government against the nation's rulers. In addition to this was the administration's ill-advised decision not to design a transition programme for a quick return of power to civilians. Instead, the government increased its suppression of political activity with time.

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In a statement on 22 July 1985, the Federal Government warned against the trend in the country at that time towards 'political controversy' which it described as illegal. The government went on to emphasize that its primary objective was to save the nation's economy and instil a sense of discipline in the body politic. It said it "would not get involved in any debate at the moment as to the nature of the government which Nigeria should operate or the form of its political arrangement in future"<sup>40</sup>. All these did not go down well with many, however, and on 27 August 1985, the Buhari regime was overthrown. In a broadcast announcing the coup, Major General Sani Abacha said:

if you could all recollect, in my maiden speech of December 31, 1983, I announced the circumstances that necessitated the Armed Forces into taking over the reins of administration of this nation. It is most disheartening that most of the ills that plagued the nation during the civilian regime are still present in our society.<sup>41</sup>

Major-General Ibrahim Babangida himself, who took the reins of power, remarked in his maiden speech that:

when in December 1983 the former military leadership of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari assumed the reins of government with the most popular enthusiasm accorded any government in the history of this country... a new sense of hope was created in the minds of every Nigerian. Since January 1984, we have witnessed a systematic denigration of that hope.<sup>42</sup>

Public support for the coup, however, was neither spontaneous nor overwhelming. Apart from relief on the part of the many people who had issues to settle with the previous regime— drug barons, discredited politicians, offenders of the new codes against indiscipline, the vast majority of the people initially adopted a 'wait and see' attitude. It was like the road had been passed before and the people were no more excited. As time went on, it became apparent that this public indifference was not just a passing phenomenon but rather a continuing attitude that eventually metamorphosed into civil hostility to the military in Nigerian politics.

#### **The Babangida–Abacha Years: 1985 – 1998, and Change in Civil Attitude to Military Involvement in Nigerian Politics**

Despite the scepticism that accompanied the Babangida coup in 1985, he nevertheless entered office with some reservoir of goodwill. His attempts to give government a human face was well received especially in the light of the perceived aloofness of the erstwhile regime. Immediately after seizing power in August 1985 from the repressive Buhari regime therefore, Major General Ibrahim Babangida took a number of steps towards political

liberalization, and also promised a programme of political transition. He denounced the harsh repression under Buhari and replaced many of the most obnoxious decrees of the regime, vowed respect for human rights, released political detainees, and shrewdly launched a public debate on the issue of whether to accept an IMF loan. This skilful political manoeuvring and image laundering initially won him wide admiration and respect even from opponents.

At the beginning of 1986, Babangida announced a transition plan for a return to civilian democratic rule in 1990. Concurrent with the political programme was a bold and far-reaching Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which began in October 1985. A shrewd and skilful political tactician, Babangida succeeded initially in winning popular support for these policies. However, as time went on, with no visible end in sight to the transition programme nor visible gains from the economic programme, public patience and hope waned. Popular misgivings about the transition programme and resentment of SAP were greatly intensified and boldened by the obvious signs of continuing corruption in high places, the blatant lack of accountability in government and the authoritarian manner in which policies were imposed. Violent outbursts of protest occurred in May 1989 in the anti-SAP riots<sup>43</sup>, while the abortive Orkar coup took place in April 1990.

The regime increasingly turned to coercion and intimidation, using a growing apparatus of state repression. "Economic hardship, political duplicity and gross mis governance wore thin and ultimately obliterated the...goodwill with which General Babangida began his tenure in office."<sup>44</sup> As a result, arbitrary arrests, detentions and harassments of the opposition, including the press, students, and human rights crusaders became commonplace. So many agonizing twists and turns had been introduced into the political programme, resulting in a number of revisions and deferments which greatly intensified public cynicism about the government's intentions. But after disqualifying all 23 presidential aspirants in November 1992, the government announced a new presidential election for June 12, 1993. On that day, the election held, and the results which came in, indicated a victory for the late Chief M.K.O. Abiola. However, the government abruptly suspended the results at first, and then, on June 23, finally cancelled the results. With this annulment of the presidential election, the crisis of legitimacy facing the government came to a head. It became so bad that the administration finally lost any semblance of legitimacy. General Babangida was ultimately forced to leave power, to 'step aside', on August 26<sup>th</sup> 1993<sup>45</sup>, leaving in his stead a caretaker Interim National Government (ING), headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan.

On November 17, 1993, the ING resigned and Babangida's close ally and co-conspirator, General Sani Abacha took over. In his maiden speech, the new Head of State acknowledged that many have expressed

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fears about the return of the military to power in the country. True to these fears, Abacha proved no more sincere or competent than his predecessors in his political transition programme or his economic policies. It was virtually two years before he announced his own timetable for transition to civilian rule and this transition plan ultimately proved infamous for its crude manipulations. Abacha's personalization of the nation's huge economic resources, his ruthlessness in jailing and crushing all sources of opposition, and the inertia of his administration even on serious and urgent national issues became legendary.<sup>46</sup> All came to an end however, on June 9, 1998, when General Abacha suddenly died. At the time of his death however, it was not in doubt that military rule had assumed a negative image in the public psyche in Nigeria. In fact, Abacha's sudden death led to widespread public jubilations across the country. General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over the government and, in recognition of the fact that Nigerians at this time wanted "nothing less than true democracy", proceeded to organize a quick transition programme. This culminated finally in the handover of power to civilians in May 1999. Civil attitudes of welcome, which greeted military intervention in Nigerian politics in earlier periods, had undoubtedly changed to civil hostility.

### **Change in Civil Attitude to Military Intervention in Politics and the Implications for Democracy in Nigeria: 1999 and Beyond**

The initial enthusiasm, which greeted military intervention in Nigerian politics was undoubtedly due to the failure of democracy in the First Republic. This failure was exemplified more than anything else by the intolerance among the political actors, which discouraged inter-party and inter-ethnic relations in the country. In the resulting stalemate, the business of government became paralyzed. It was the general expectation that with the attributes of the army, it was well positioned to bring the nation back to track. It was believed that the army could translate their touted discipline into enhancing and streamlining the authority base of government while the attributes of cohesiveness would enable the army arrest the disturbing discordance of opposition and instead, channel the different and differing ideas into the formulation of effective policies.

Apart from the general attributes of the army, there was also the hope that for once, instead of the cunning and deceit of the politician, there would be a government headed by men that could be believed and trusted for their words. The military also came as corrective regimes. The fact that they intervened at times when the civilian regimes they replaced had come to their wits end, led to a general expectation that they had something different and better to offer. This was heightened by the whole lot of condemnations of the past and promises of the future made by the incoming military regimes. In addition, there was also the promise of a new democracy based on transition plans that would remove the pitfalls of the

past. As time went on and military rule assumed more permanence in the nation's body politic, this initial enthusiasm dissipated. This was mainly in realization that the expectations on which such enthusiasm was based could not be realized. The corrective pretences of military regimes was soon exposed, when after reasonable periods in office, they had neither corrected the ills of the past nor made any appreciable moves for a better future.<sup>47</sup>

Instead, what was found was an aggravation of past ills. In fact, each succeeding administration seemed to ensure that it outperformed its predecessor in the business of public looting. The Murtala Mohammed regime's probe of the Gowon regime found so much sleaze in the erstwhile regime. Following the exposure of the misdeeds of the erstwhile military governors after civilian governors assumed office in January 1992 under the Babangida transition programme, there were even fears of probe of the former military governors by lawmakers in different states. The exposures of the Abacha regime following the death of the Head of State rendered the 1976 findings a child's play. Aggravating the above was the fact of the non-performance in office by military regimes. After the 29 years of the military in Nigerian politics, there was still not much to show for the huge revenues that accrued to the country within the period.

The various attributes of the army, which had commended them to the people, were eventually rubbished by military rule. For instance, the various coups initiated by the military against military regimes ultimately put to rest the much-touted cohesiveness and esprit de corps of the military. Various unprofessional conducts by military elements exposed their pretensions about discipline in the army. Then, the well-known lies and deceptions that have marked the various military regimes, especially the Babangida regime, finally served to rubbish the honour of the military officer. As Obasanjo put it, himself a retired officer and former Head of State, it "got to the stage that when government says good morning, people will look out four times to ascertain the time of the day before they reply".<sup>48</sup> All these led to loss of legitimacy, leading military regimes in Nigeria to increasingly turn to repression and force to sustain them in government.

The failure of the military in government led to public disenchantment which in turn led to calls for the military to go back to the barracks and for a return to democracy. The Babangida transition programme was actually in response to such calls. All the manipulations that accompanied this programme did not in any way reduce the stridence of the calls. Instead, the attempt by Babangida at transition, culminating in the June 12, 1992 elections, and the cancellation of the results of that election, ultimately increased the desperation for the return of the military to the barracks. The Abacha programme which came after Babangida's, only reinforced the desperation of those demands. Abacha's later attempts to transit and transmute from a military Head of State to a civilian president, finally destroyed the military's one last claim to legitimacy- their pretence

at being democratizing agents. General Abdulsalam Abubakar tried to restore some respect for the military, when he carried out his transition programme that successfully transferred power back to civilians in 1999.

Since then, democracy has been taking root in the country. In about 15 years of unbroken civilian rule, politicians seem to be steadily gaining experience in the ways of governance. Party politics is becoming more purposeful, and political behaviour is generally becoming more civil. Performance in office though, has not been very encouraging, especially considering the enormous revenues that have accrued to the country ever since civilian rule was restored in the country. Poverty has climbed to all-time highs, and corruption remains pervasive. Then, the political system continues to witness hiccups, including the tensions which often pervade the polity, or other periods when conflicts emerge and even explode in violence. Yet, the foregoing has clearly shown that there is no basis for the military to even think of a comeback to politics in Nigeria.

In the so many years of military rule in the country, the military did not acquit itself favourably. It usually came as corrective regimes. But at no time did the military ever successfully correct the ills of civilian regimes. Instead, in most cases, the ills were actually compounded by the military regimes. This was not surprising, because the military institution is not actually suited for democratic rule. The major characteristics of the military are not amenable to democracy- command, hierarchy, and obedience. Democracy requires instead, discussion, dialogue and debate. Against the tendency of the military to decide issues arbitrarily or with force, democracy will rather encourage consensus and compromise. Because of the nature of military rule, the people were always aloof. In a democracy, the people participate in the affairs of government. It is because of all the above factors that the military must, in this Fourth Republic, aim to do what it is best suited to do, which is to refrain from politics and protect the sovereignty of the nation.

Moreover, the Nigerian military can learn from its own experiences and those of other armies elsewhere. In several wartimes, the Nigerian military has acquitted itself favourably- during the Nigerian civil war, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and in the several other peacekeeping missions abroad that the Nigerian military has been part of. What the Nigerian military may need to do is to spend its time between active operations, in preparations for military readiness. The personnel should always be engaged in trainings and development so as to be always ready whenever called upon- to defend the territorial integrity of the nation and to contribute to world peace. In extended peacetimes, the military could even engage its personnel in civil works and business undertakings. The well-known multinational civil engineering firm, Arab Contractors, is owned by the engineering corps of the Egyptian army. The different corps of the Nigerian army could set up business outfits- in civil engineering, electrical



engineering, telecommunications, logistics and others that would provide commercial services and execute civil contracts. Military personnel, instead of staying essentially idle in their offices or even remaining on routine duties for long that could become boring, could then be posted to project locations or factories for a period of time, on tour of duty.

### Conclusion

The change in the civil attitude to military intervention in Nigerian politics from welcome, passivity to hostility is a reflection of the failure of military rule in the country. This failure itself shows that the military institution is not suited for politics and governance. This paper has shown that the initial welcome of the military into Nigerian politics was predicated on the belief among the people that the military had the capacity to correct the mistakes of the politicians of the First Republic. When it became obvious that these problems were not being solved, the attitude of the people changed to hostility. The paper found that military intervention in Nigerian politics did not ultimately augur well for the country. The military is not well-suited for political governance, and most of the huge revenues that accrued to the country during the period of military rule was wasted or otherwise, misused. The paper also found that ironically, military intervention in politics did not augur well for the military institution itself in Nigeria. Military involvement in Nigerian politics led to a fall in military discipline and professionalism, as well as a depreciation in military infrastructure. This is why the paper recommends that the Nigerian military should stay away from politics at all times. Instead, the military should concern itself with its constitutional role while leaving politics to politicians, who, through the efforts to correct their mistakes and address the problems the nation faces, could finally institutionalize democracy in the country.

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