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REVIEW ARTICLE

MILITARY INTERVENTION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA:
NIGERIA AS A SELECTED CASE

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ABSTRACT

The regimented institution of the military is designed and established to be professionally well trained in the process of national defense and protection of the citizenry against external aggression and invasion. But this institution (the military) had for the past century been involved in political participation through an illegal and unconstitutional *modus-operandi*. This paper examines the historical background of military as an institution in Africa, revisiting the hitherto pre-colonial African militaristic structure. It also analyses the nature of colonial military institution as it was used to dominate the African continent and its structure after decolonization. The paper has adopted the secondary methodology to arrive at its findings. It discovered that, the military had grossly underdeveloped the continent after the withering of colonialism, as a result of corruption, favoritism, ethnicity and lack of proper bureaucratic principles. The paper concludes that, albeit the military is dictatorial in nature, but it has maintained law and order especially in Nigeria better than the so called democratic government (of President Jonathan). The paper recommends maximum restraint of the military vis a vis political power and stronger military-civilian relations as constitutionally defined, among other things.

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INTRODUCTION

The political cinema of militarism and political cataclysm in Africa has made the continent to be backward, plunged into ethnic and tribal divide; raided of its treasury and human rights abused. At a particular point in time Africa had suffered from turbulent military cataclysm and upheavals, one time in Egypt and another time in Togo, Zambia, Nigeria to mention but few. But one disturbing factor of the whole process is how Africans became under internal colonization by their own people, who without sympathy exploited the continent without any consideration to the fact that they belong to the place where they were destroying, their families will continue to live there even in their absence. The political artifice and avarice of the military had engendered depopulation of prominent people who were submissive to the course of nationhood and also fought for the emancipation of the black race. Such people included Nkrumah of Ghana and prominent politicians in Nigeria such as Tafawa Balewa, Zik, Sardauna of sokoto, Awolowo, Anthony Enahoro to mention but few. The epitome of what the above nationalists experienced is the gruesome murder of Gandhi of India despite his complete sacrifice to the people of India and to humanity in general, his people murdered him after India attained independence.

The description of the nature of military regimes in Africa and its autocratic tendencies has been identified by A.A. Nwankwo when he wrote:

I projected too that no same and self respecting civilized society should ever allow itself to be governed by the military, as the only true path to genuine popular democracy, remains the force of the people's sovereignty and democratic self expression. The military holds in utter contempt and scorn Military rule, all military rule, no matter its character, structure or content, or the reasons it came into power, is an aberration, a misnomer in this time and age.[1]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology used in this research as earlier mentioned is the secondary method of data collection, which is an embodiment of library materials such as text books, journals, periodicals, news papers, magazines, reports and others. The research is also historical-descriptive in nature, meaning it delves into historical perspective and describe the nature of the military as an institution and the level of damage made by the military in Nigeria. The methodology is also substantiated by a theoretical framework, which as chosen in this research, is the political development theory. The political development theory explains the nature of political institutions and democratic consolidation within a polity. That a state with strong and developed political institutions such as democracy itself, rule

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of law and respect to the virtue of man in the society, will not adhere to military coup or dictatorship. Prominent among the theorists of political development are: Samuel Huntington (1977) and Jenkins and Kposowa (1992). Their primary argument is that countries with lagging political development open the doors for participation crisis and hence invite military intervention in politics. [2] [3]

The relevance of the political development theory of military intervention to this topic is that, Africa began to experience military mutinies immediately after the continent opened up for decolonization and independence. In that era, political institutions were not matured and developed. This had made participation difficult, but political power was subjected to monopoly structuration and marginalization. This justified the inevitability of military intervention in African politics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is universally acknowledged that the military exists to protect the territorial integrity of a state; to fight against all forms of external aggression; to deliver in any form of confrontation which may require the services of armed forces within the boundaries of a nation. The military in Africa was seen as an institution of pride and defense even prior to the advent of the colonialists into Africa. They immensely contributed to the political evolution of societies through conquest and state expansion. [4] This argument was obvious in Benin, the Yoruba and Kanuri areas in Nigeria; among the Zulu in South Africa, the kikuyu in Kenya and in many areas of the continent.

In colonial Africa similarly, the political bungalow was impregnated by colonial predators through a deliberate instrumentality of the foreign forces. African states such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Sudan, Kenya etc, were harnessed and conquered by the British colonial Gangsters who used their own military forces to conquer and dominate the continent.[5] The French scavengers equally did same in the areas of Senegal, Algeria, Danomey (Benin Republic) and Chad.[6] It is in line with the above that S.O. Arifalo asserts that: "When the European colonizers came to Africa their armies were the instruments that they used to conquer, expand and consolidate their hold on the territories".[7] But it is important to know that military mutiny and intervention into politics is not just an African invention, but rather a replication of European political disorder, which paradoxically metamorphosed into a political virus, contagious in nature and affected the whole continents of the globe. F.O. Adeyemo has this to argue:

The phenomenon of military coup d'état is not confined to Africa alone. It has occurred in Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Pakistan and most of the Latin and central American countries such as Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina.[8]

In the post colonial Africa, however, the question of military remains how to transform the colonial military system. The nature and structure of African Army has totally changed to the shape of the European military. It is axiomatic to argue that our military in contemporary Africa is not a modification of the colonial heritage. The African military had started well

with their role and function of security services, but later resorted to costume make-up through military pavilion. It is in line with the above that H.B. Okibe critically observed:

Military formation is an autograph of colonial complexes in Africa... with the pervasive western contradictions crippled the continent earliest efforts at nation building and impregnated its politics with psychosis... it initially showed itself averse to the erratic pattern of political gangsterism which was in vogue at the formative years of nation head but later became more disposed to immutable avalanche of political rebellion which turned most African countries to military pavilion.[9]

The process of militaristic mutiny in Africa

The inception of military mutiny in Africa is traceable to the Maghreb (northern Africa), when the first military coup took place in Egypt around 1952,[10] but the first military coup in West Africa was a product of 1963, when on the 13th July of the year, officers shoved the hitherto existing regime in Togo.[11]

It was in the same year when Togolese government was overthrown; the room of military watershed was opened: Turbulent coups were carried out in Dahomey, Burundi and Congo Brazzaville. The removal and assassination of President Silvanus Olympio who was alleged to have decreased the salaries of the army in Togo resulted into the overthrow of government in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Gabon in 1964. The overthrow of Leon Mba of Gabon was said to be bloodless. It became clear that within one decade, military coup in Africa has become a contagious turbulence. In 1965, the military toppled political regimes in Zaire, Dahomey, which dated 25th November and 26th November respectively. The government which came to power in Dahomey was also toppled on the 22 December, 1965.[12]

It was also in the same year (1965) that another coup d'état occurred in Algeria, which was led by Houari Boumedienne and the coup marked the twilight of Ahmed Ben Bella's Administration.[14] In 1966, similarly, military officers had shoved political regimes in the central African Republic, upper volta (Burkinafaso), Uganda, Mali, Somalia, Burundi, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ghana and Nigeria.[12] It was in this respect that S.O. Arifalo inferred:

By 1975, twenty-one of the forty-one independent states were being ruled by military or civilian- military groups. The potential power of the gun is everywhere in Africa, a disturbing reality.[15]

Internal causes of military intervention in African politics

Some of the major causes of military intervention in African politics, which are internally motivated, are as follows:

Corruption and Inefficiency: the military in African politics give an impression of inefficiency and corrupt nature of political regimes in their countries. Consequently, they claim

“to correct the political incongruity.” Such countries that claimed corruption and inefficiency as reasons for intervention include: Ghana, Congo Brazzaville and Nigeria. The Nigeria’s First Republic was described by Ojukwu (the Biafran leader) as wasted years of helplessness, incompetence, abuse of office and gross disregard for the interest of the common man.[16]

1. Political Opportunism: political opportunism has to do with nepotism, favoritism and ascription of positions not based on merit but on privilege basis. This has been the case with Ghana as the major cause of military intervention. The reason for the coup of 24 February 1966 was clearly described by general Ankrah when he emphasized that, it was to:

Banish privilege, overlordism, political opportunism, wasteful pompousness and incompetence, and thereby restore to the people of Ghana the blessings of liberty, justice and human dignity.[17]

By 13 January 1972, Ignatius Acheampong shared the regime of K.A Busia on the ground of economic basis such as in the areas of the level of Ghana’s indebtedness, fall in the price of cocoa in the world market and the ban on the importation of cars.[18] On 5th July 1978, Acheampong was evacuated from power in a bloodless coup by general Fred Akuffo who claimed to bring unity and integration among the people of Ghana. On 15th June, 1979, flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings shoved the regime of Akuffo, Rawlings claimed that Akuffo could not bring changes from the evils of his predecessors.

2. Fear of Disintegration: when there is tendency for national disunity and disintegration, the military intervene to restore peace and stability. But the question remains, how stable are military regimes in Africa. The answer (though the question sounds rhetorical) is absolutely unstable. This factor of disintegration was peculiar to Sudan. The first military coup was engendered by the fear of domination expressed by the people of southern Sudan. Their fear, however, was that the Muslim northerners should not dominate them when independence was achieved. In 1958, similarly, there was a revolt of the army in the north, led by Ibrahim Abboud. In 1969, the army surfaced again under colonel Gaafar Mohammed Uimeiri.[19]
3. Ethnicity: the divergent nature of African people and the necessity of the impediment of leaving together despite differences in tribal affiliation, religion, history and culture, it made it inevitable the consideration of ethnic affiliation before loyalty to the state. One ethnic group struggled to dominate the rest of others in the society by capitalizing on the level of military support it has in the country. Dahomey (Benin Republic) has been one of the epitome of this primitive barbarism. The political tribulation characterized by ethnic rivalry resulted into social disequilibrium. S.O. Arifolo has captured the situation in Dahomey when he argues:

The problems of Dahomey centered on regional and conflicting ethnic interest. Migan Apithy, Hubert Maga and Justin Ahomadegbe nese in succession as leaders of ethnic, regional or sectional interest.[20]

Military interregna are not just a political calculus that puzzled or paused political and economic development in Dahomey. Nigeria and Togo are not exceptional.

4. Economic Stagflation: another reason advanced by the military as a cause of intervention is economic stagflation. But sometimes the reason given for intervention is not always cogent or vivid. In Uganda, the regime of Milton Obote (the Ugandan prime minister) was removed by Idi Amin, by accusing the regime of depressed economy, ethnic unrest and official corruption. The decadent nature of military welfarism in Zaire, having to do with long years of service without promotion or a reliable increase in salary has gravitated Mobutu Sese Seko to intervene as a military dictator and a bureaucratic head.[21]
5. Ideology: the question of ideology is not to be answered by the military personnel in Africa. But this has taken another dimension in the armed forces of the Maghreb (North Africa). The ideological movement was basically on Arab socialism as carried out by colonel Ghaddafi of Libya. Such ideology was revolutionary in nature due to the desire for change, by destroying the monarchy. King Idris was overthrown in 1969 by colonel Ghaddafi who mobilized for Arab socialism modeled from Algeria and Egypt. [22] The same ideology had motivated the unsuccessful overthrow of the regime of King Hassan of Morocco in 1971.

The Nigeria’s experience

Military intervention in Nigeria’s political development is not a new phenomenon in the literature of political science and Nigerian history. It all started on the 15th of January 1966, when a group of young officers led by Nzeogwu Kaduna plotted the bloodiest coup in the history of Nigeria, in which many civilian leaders such as the then prime minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the then premier of the northern region Sir Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto, the then minister of finance Ebote, were cold bloodedly murdered.[23] Immediately after the coup, Aguyi Ironsi emerged as the new military head of state in Nigeria. In this process, the northerners were touched by the prevailing wind of regional, ethnic and religious tension, for the northerners felt severely wounded and what they looked ahead to see was how to take a vengeance against the killing of prominent northern politicians murdered in the first coup.

By 29 July 1966 (in the same year) another military coup had already taken place. It was a young northern military officer (Gowon) who plotted the coup against Ironsi. Ironsi and Adegunle Fajuyi were kidnapped and their whereabouts were not known. Their corpses were only seen after the kidnap. This has rather escalated more tension in the polity as the Igbo were questioning the qualification of the new head of state as a young officer to be the president and where about of Ironsi? This has been part of the immediate reasons of the secession of Biafra and the subsequent outbreak of Nigeria’s civil war.[24] The second military coup was peaceful, as Gowon was attending OAU’s summit out of the country, when Murtala Ramat Bello declared that Gowon has been detached from the seat of leadership as Nigerian head of state in 1975. Murtala did not execute all his administrative plans, when a group of

military officers from plateau state plotted another coup which killed Murtala Muhammed in Lagos. After the killing of Murtala in 1976, Obasanjo came to power and organized a plan for democratic transition which was successful in 1979.[25]

The new civilian government of Shagari was shoved in a military coup in 1993/94, which brought Muhammadu Bukhari to power. In 1995, another military coup had already taken place, which brought Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida to power. Babangida had stayed longer than any serving military head of state, but his desire to continue leading the country faced a total protest from Nigerians and outside world. This had led to the formation of an interim national government under Shonekan before elections were conducted. But Shonekan was removed by Abacha and become the new military head of state.[26] Abacha was naturally removed in 1998 through a natural death, when he was attempting to abdicate and remerge as a civilian president. Abdussalam Abubakar succeeded Abacha as the new head of state and successfully handed over power to democratically elected government in 1999, with Obasanjo as president.[27]

How the military underdeveloped Nigeria

When there were statistically over eighty (80) Coup D'état and about 108 failed coup attempts between 1956 and 2001, it suffices researchers to concentrate on the impact of military rule in Africa. [28]

Military dictatorship not only in Nigeria, but in the whole of Africa, has instigated many evils and negative impact on the country in particular and the continent in general. Military rule has brought about: (a) corruption (b) abuse of human rights (c) devaluation of currencies (d) economic decay (e) institutional collapse (f) has widened the gap between rich and poor (g) it has tarnished Nigeria's image abroad (h) they have frustrated efforts for democratic rule (i) they have changed the course of Nigeria's history (j) they have created unemployment and suffering among Nigerians (k) they have underdeveloped the continent. Albeit all these factors accounted for the evils of military dictatorship, the regimes have established more federal universities, polytechnics, unity schools and federal colleges of education. The NYSC program was established to reduce tension and ignorance of Nigerian people of their fellow Nigerians living in other parts of the country.

The first military regimes

Despite the crusade against bribery and corruption, the Gowon administration has been described as one of the regimes that could not fight corruption in the country. Some of the peculiar characteristics of the regime were: Graft, bribery, nepotism "gift" giving through which influence and authority were asserted. It was reported that In 1973, the federal government established a special anticorruption police force called the "X-Squad", whose subsequent investigations showed ingenious forms of extortion and fraud not only in government and public corporations but in private business and in the professions in general.

1. One bewildering corruption scandal was revealed in the mid-1970s; it involved the "purchase abroad of construction materials by state agents at prices well above market values. Rake-offs were pocketed by public officials and private contractors". Other scandals in hospitals and orphanages shocked the populace, while corruption in importing medical drugs whose effective dates long since had expired revealed that even the health of Nigerians was at risk [29]
2. It also transpired that in mid 1975, 400 cargo ships and about 250 of them carrying 1.5 million tons of cement clogged the harbor of Lagos, which had been paralyzed for fifteen months with vessels waiting to be unloaded. To compound the error, spoiled and inferior-grade cement was concealed by mixing it with acceptable material for use in public building projects. Later, buildings collapsed or had to be dismantled because of the inferior product. New roads washed away because of bad construction and inadequate controls. In these scandals, as in others, the culprits were a combination of Nigerian businessmen, government officials, and foreign companies. Few people and few projects seemed exempt from the scourge. [30]

The Regime of Murtala Muhammed

The erring officers of Gowon regime were later sacked by Murtala administration in his attempt to sanitize the civil service in the Country. The regime of Murtala was a watershed in laying the foundation of transparency in leadership, by sincerely fighting corruption and abuse of public office. The regime did not last long, but before his assassination, Murtala had started making programs for political transition in to democratic rule. It was same preparation to democracy that Obasanjo continued, and finally brought Shagari to power.[31]

The Shagari Regime

Shagari administration has been one of the worst regimes with financial gladiators in Nigeria. When an investigation panel started probing some suspicious corrupt practices, few federal buildings mysteriously went on fire after investigators started probe on the finances of the officials working in the buildings.[32]

Secondly, in the late 1985, a probe into the collapse of the hitherto Johnson Mathey Bank of London paved a way to the discovery of some of the abuses carried out during the second republic. The bank acted as an intermediary to transfer hard currency for some party members in Nigeria. A few leading officials and politicians siphoned Nigerian money which they sought to transfer out of the country with the help of Asian importers by issuing import licenses. Thirdly, it was revealed in 1981 that, a Rice shortage, led to accusations of corruption against the NPN government. The case was alleged to be protectionist in nature, as after Shagari's election, his government decided to protect the local rice farmer from imported commodities. A licensing system was created to limit the amount of rice import. But accusations of favoritism and government supported speculation were leveled against many officials. [33]

Corruption and Re-emergence of the Military-Buhari

Buhari emerged to correct the anomalies and corrupt practices of Shagari regime. The second republic being one of the most corrupt governments Nigeria ever had, Buhari was faced with a challenge of arresting the corrupt officials of Shagari administration. The tribunals set up in May 1984 by the Buhari regime to try the corrupt former ministers, governors, and politicians had revealed many misappropriation of public fund. For example between July 5 and 9 1983, Chief Bisi Obasanjo, the former governor of Ogun State, together with two other governors were found guilty for soliciting illicit side payments totaling 2.8 million naira. The other governors were acquitted, but Chief Onabanjo was sentenced to 22 years in prison. [34] Some other governors from different regions were also indicted of different levels of corruption and they were equally imprisoned. Other cases of prosecution included Umaru Dikko, the transport and aviation minister in the second republic that fled to Britain. He was alleged to have amassed a fortune of over one billion US dollars during barely three years in office. Justice Sampson Uwaifo tribunal for instance reported that it recovered over 200 million Naira in cash, real estate and vehicles, and more than 35 million naira from politicians, public officers, and contractors. There was also the fraud at the ministry of telecommunication where the government was losing 50 million naira per month. [35]

Babangida, Abacha and Abdussalami Administration

Corruption in Nigeria under these two regimes had gathered momentum. The two regimes had ways of welcoming and accommodating corruption. For example, Babangida's administration pardoned and released the second republic politicians that were jailed for corruption by the Buhari regime. He also returned their confiscated properties to them. This trend, however, has made critics to make the inference that the regime had legalized corruption. The Okigbo panel report revealed that Babangida established a 'dedicated account' into which the windfall from the first gulf war was paid. The account held the sum of 12.4 billion US dollars but at the time of enquiry only 206 million dollars were left there. The two people who managed the accounts were Babangida and the then governor of Central Bank, the late Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed. [36]

The Abacha regime was not an exception. He treated the Nigerian Central Bank like a family property; He issued cheques of billions of naira whenever he wished to; He was listed among the ten most corrupt world leaders with 2-5 billion US dollars loot. There was 4 billion US dollars looted money in which the UK financial services authority indicted fifteen British banks, and the 4-5 billion US dollars secret Nigerian debt buyback scheme. In addition, there was the 2.5 billion US dollars Ajaokuta steel debt buyback scam involving Abacha's minister. Others included 80 million US dollars over payment to Chase Manhattan Bank, 10 million US dollars reversal payment on Paris Club debts and 27 million US dollars to SACE of Italy. [37] Abdulsalam was also accused of looting Nigerian treasury, which transpired in his Maizube Holdings, which is a collection of various businesses (farms, estates and all sorts of companies). One of his most recent establishments

is the building of MAIZUBE Estate in Abuja, Nigeria. The estate has recently been leased/rented by Total for its staff. In order not to be discovered, Abdulsalam gave Israeli expatriates billions of naira to a construction that Nigeria could easily have done. The Israelis eventually sub-contracted every aspect of the construction to Nigerian builders, architects, engineers, painters, etc. They only paid out only 1/8 of what they were earned from general Abdussalam. [38]

Conclusion

With the widespread of corruption which was institutionalized by the military through their intervention in African politics, it is evident that the continent is lagging behind in so many aspects of development. But the military have also tried their own best in maintaining law and order in African states, especially in Nigeria where civil war was fought between 1967 and 1970. Gowon regime in particular had yielded enough handouts to see that the unity of Nigeria was really maintained and institutions for national unification were put in place. The military in Africa also developed a particular culture of abdicating and contesting for democratic elections thereby ruling with military mentality. Many attempts have been made (Babangida, Abacha and Obasanjo), but only Obasanjo in Nigeria succeeded in making this trend fulfilled. Despite the shortcomings of military regimes in Africa and in Nigeria, the era of military rule, particularly in Nigeria was far better than the regime of president Jonathan. It is only under Jonathan that general insecurity has been unleashed in the state, state terrorism was justified, corruption and godfathersim promoted. People of the ruling party are placed above the law.

Recommendation

Albeit even in this twenty first century Africa still experience military intervention (Guinea, Mali, Central Africa, Egypt etc), there are still other areas which if explored, will keep the army in the barracks, make them loyal to the civilians and maintain their veritable function of protecting the state. The military must be taught how to discharge their function effectively and restrain from interventionist move towards state's politics. Two, the military must be disciplined in respecting the civilians and protecting them, not to acquire political power through the barrels of a gun. Three, civilian democratic leaders must allow for proper participation of the citizenry in their political affairs. Four, democratic institutions must conduct free, fair and periodic elections as at when due, and avoid election rigging, as this, invites the military to intervene. Five, civilian government must provide maximum security to members of the public, as failure to secure the lives of the people may also attract the military to take over. Six, the economy must grow and make some progress, to avoid inflationary or deflationary trend. Economic collapse and institutional decay may attract the military to power.

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