

## **Military in Nigerian Politics: Implication for Nation Building 1966 - 1998**

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### **Abstract**

*At the inauguration of Nigeria's independence, the prospect for democracy in the new nation seemed promising. In spite of the fact that the various political parties were ethnically and regionally based, the political parties that contested with each other in the federal election for the independence parliament were somehow able to create a government that appealed to the majority of Nigerians. But the hopes which attended Nigeria's independence did not sustain their grip on the country. This work examines that as Nigeria grows older; its political economic fortunes begin to decline. This paper finds out that, in the first five years of independence, Nigeria experienced several crises, largely political in nature which challenged the basis of its claim to a political united nation. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, 1966, the myth of civil supremacy in Nigeria's civil military relations was shattered. The army seized political power and subjected the nation to military dictatorship, which eventually lasted for twenty seven years. The paper thus argues that, during this period of military rule, the expectation was that the military would proffer solutions to the numerous socio-political challenges and crises that destroyed the First Republic. Relying on secondary sources, this study further argues that ethnicity, religious crises, economic crisis, etc necessitates military intervention in Nigeria politics. This paper is historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. Useful pieces of information were obtained from important relevant documents, reports and array of secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** Military, Nigeria, Politics, Implication, Nation-Building

### **Introduction**

The military is designed to be a special institution of state policy charged with the statutory rule of protecting the country from both internal and external threat to security. As a matter of constitutional provision, the military must be subordinate to the civil authority of the state.<sup>1</sup> It therefore means that they must only do the bidding of the civilian – political leaders for the survival and ability of the polity. The military as an organization is subject to the vicissitudes of the Nigerian society just as any social institutions within the county.<sup>2</sup>

The manner in which the colonial masters granted independence to most African countries have been seen as being responsible for the lack of interest in the military as a political force. This is unlike the Latin American countries where independence was acquired through protracted wars. In most African nations, independence was granted through constitutional negotiations. This peaceful transfer of power gave considerable advantage to other political forces in the task of nation building. The failure of these forces helped to prepare the way for the military intervention in politics.<sup>3</sup>

January 15, 1966 marked the beginning of military incursion into the Nigerian politics. It was the first time soldiers seized power through the barrel of the gun. Like the MAO TSE TUNG dictum that “*power flow from the barrel of the gun*” Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu led six other majors in what was seen as the bloodiest military coup to topple the Tafawa Belewa civilian government. Following the casualties of the coup there was a suspicion that the Nzeogwu led coup was ethnical based as prominent politicians and senior military officers killed were mostly Northerners and Westerners.<sup>4</sup>

During post independent Nigeria, the military abandoned the seclusion of the barracks, truncated the nascent democratic system of the country and subjected both the civil authorities population and the constitution to the whims and caprices of the military region. On assumption of power the various military regimes (in an apparent attempt to seek legitimacy) made several introductions, modifications and experimentation designed to solve the nation’s problems. These efforts no doubt, left tremendous impacts on the socio – political and economic landscape of the country.

The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the theoretical framework on which the work derives its analysis. The third is conceptual clarification. The fourth examines the brief history of military in Nigeria, while the fifth discusses the reason for military intervention in Nigeria politics. The penultimate section is an analysis of military in Nigeria politics. The last part is the conclusion. The argument tends to suggest that lack of professionalism is a factor of military in Nigeria politics. The work argues that using the army to quell riot in the country is not the duty of the army. This paper exposes the underlying factors that Nigerian armies have no heroic history of war, all in the Barrack nothing to occupy them making them get bored.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical conception of this work is based on the “Praetorian Theory”, otherwise referred to as the “Theory of the Praetorian State”, as a framework that will guide this study. The theory’s major proponents are Amos Perlmutter, E.A. Nordlinger and Samuel Huntington, who anchored the logic of the theory on the political activities of the Praetorian Guards of the ancient Roman Empire, who, as a result of their proximity to power, deviated from their traditional role of guarding the emperor to that of corrupt king makers, who would sell their loyalty to the highest bidder, and impose their choice on the Roman’s senate.<sup>5</sup>

The theory states that Praetorianism involves a situation where the military class of a given society exercises independent political power within it by virtue of an actual or threatened use of military force. According to the proponents of the theory, Praetorian states are characterised by politicized armed forces as well as militarized politics, factionalism among the officer’s corps, law makers and administrators fall into disarray, political apathy among citizens who utter cynicism towards the political process.

The theory argues that any state which exhibits the trappings of a praetorian state, is likely going to have a problematic civil-military relation.<sup>6</sup> The relevance of this theory to the study of civil-military relation in Nigeria, is that Nigeria right from the inception of political independence in 1960, has exhibited the undisguised characteristics of a praetorian state, with its armed forces behaving more like Praetorian Guards. This has given the military undue advantage over the civil-society in all spheres of national endeavours, such that most political leaders in the country’s history were either serving generals or retired generals. This has

resulted in a situation where soldiers feel superior to their civilian counterparts even in this democratic dispensation.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Though widely used the term “nation building” remains imprecise and contested in much of the policy documentation, its meaning is assumed rather than defined.<sup>7</sup> According to Nwabugbuogu, nation building is a search for nationhood. It is a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their commitment to a nation state.<sup>8</sup>

### **A Brief History of Military in Nigeria**

The Nigeria Armed Forces is divided into the Army, the Navy and the Air Forces.<sup>9</sup> At this juncture we will be looking at these forces as follow:

**The Nigeria Army:** The Nigeria Army as it is known today may not have had any indigenous history of evolution.<sup>10</sup> It emerged as a bye-product of European involvement in the affairs of the various people of pre-colonial Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the present Army evolves from the military campaigns used by the British in their conquest of Nigerian communities between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Its origin can be traced to the various Para-military forces established to strengthen British suzerainty and protect her economic interests in the various parts of pre-colonial Nigeria. These forces include the Lagos Constabulary, the Royal Niger Company Constabulary and the Niger Coast Protectorate Force.<sup>12</sup>

The Lagos Constabulary, which was the first of those forces, metamorphosed from the “Glover Hausas”- a force formed by Lt. Glover of the Royal Navy in 1863 with about eighteen indigenes of Northern Nigeria who were probably runaway slaves. The “Glover’s Hausas” or “Hausa militia” as it was called was constituted to facilitate the conquest and subsequent establishment of British hegemony over Lagos.

Sequel to need to protect Lagos from French incursion, the British government in London approved and upgraded the “Glover Hausas” to a regular and subsequently, it was renamed Lagos Constabulary in 1865. At the time, the Lagos Constabulary was charged with responsibility of carrying out both military and police duties, and to mount punitive expeditions in the hinterland.<sup>13</sup> Later, this force became part of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) as Lagos Battalion in 1901.<sup>14</sup>

The Royal Niger Company (RNC) constabulary was probably the second force established by the British in Nigeria. This force was organized by Sir George Tubman Goldie (a British commercial magnet) as a military backup for his Royal Niger Company, which in 1886, had received a royal charter to oversee the government and defence of the territories along rivers Niger and Benue. It was with this force that Goldie was able deal with the local threat to British monopoly of trade along the Niger, and was also able to keep the French out of Northern Nigeria thereby securing for the British territories like Emirate of Yola and the extensive Borno Empire.<sup>15</sup>

The third force established by the British was the Oil Rivers Irregulars. This force was later renamed the Niger Coast Protectorate Force. Formed by MAJOR Cloud M. MacDonald, the force was established as a response to the threat post to the British trading interest by the Blacks

Middlemen and other groups in the Niger Delta Region. Its headquarters was in Calabar.<sup>16</sup> It has been claimed that the Niger Constabulary Force was responsible for the destruction of the stronghold of the indigenous middlemen along Kua Igbo River, Cross River, Calabar, Opobo, Bonny, Kalabari and Warri. It was this force that was responsible for the punitive expedition against Brass, Nana of Ebrohimi, and Benin Massacre of 1897.<sup>17</sup> According to T. N. Tamuno,

The Niger Coast Protectorate Constabulary in January 1900, became the 3<sup>rd</sup> Niger Battalion and subsequently the Southern Nigeria regiment, WAFF. Between 1901 and 1905, these over a thousand strong came under the command of Lt. Col A. F. Montanaro of the Royal Garrison Artillery.<sup>18</sup>

Although, the various constabulary forces, as we have noted in the foregoing paragraphs, might have fought separate wars to subjugate various or individual communities, when real colonial conquest began they were discovered to be only good for sporadic warfare. How many of them could be strong enough to resist the French? Dan O. Chukwu has aptly pointed out that French incursion into areas that were of vital interest to the British in West Africa was a major challenge to British. According to him,

... It became obvious that neither the constabulary forces nor the forces of the Royal Niger Company were capable of worthy of the French military incursion into her areas of interest in West Africa. It was partly in order to ward off French offensives from the territories being claimed by the British and partly to conquer more territories that the colonial office in London in 1897 requested Frederick Lugard to raise a West African force of about 3000 men for the conquest West Africa. Thus by the end of 1898, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was established to facilitate the process of conquest and pacification of West Africa.<sup>19</sup>

The West Africa Frontier Force (WAFF) was thus established in 1898 under the command of Frederick D. Lugard to include all the forces in the British colonies of Nigeria, the Coast, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. The components of the force were stationed in all British colonial possessions. In Nigeria, S. G. Tyoden has noted that force was made up of three regiments: the Northern Regiment in the Northern Protectorate, the Lagos Battalion in Lagos and the Southern Regiment in Southern Protectorate. When the Southern Protectorate and Lagos Colony were amalgamated in 1906, the Lagos Battalion became the second division of the Southern Regiment. Similarly, in 1914 when the Northern and Southern Protectorate were amalgamated to form Nigeria as a country, the Northern and Southern Regiment were merged to form the Nigeria Regiment Frontier Force.<sup>20</sup> In 1928, the WAFF was renamed the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) and during the 1930s expanded from four battalions to six battalions which served in two theatres. The Northern and Southern commands had major installation at Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, Maiduguri, Yola, Enugu and Calabar.<sup>21</sup>

In 1958 the West Africa Frontier Force was disbanded and the regiment from four ex-British territories became separate commands.<sup>22</sup> In Nigeria, although the British War Office in London formally handed over control of the Nigeria regiment to Nigerians, the British Governor General, assisted by a defence council composed of representative of the Federal and Regional Government, still control and commanded the Nigeria regiment. In 1960, after Queen Elizabeth II embarked on a tour to Nigeria, the Nigerian Regiment was renamed the Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment (QONR) possibly to show that although the country was politically independence, it

still owe some semblance loyalty to the Queen of England. However, upon the attainment of Republican status in 1963, the Queen's Own Nigerian Regiment (QONR) became The Nigeria Army.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Nigerian Navy**

The Nigerian Navy, like the Nigerian Army, is a creation of British colonialism. Its origin could be traced to the Colonial Marine Department of the Royal Navy, established in 1887 as a quasi-military organization to police the water ways as well as the rich Maritime Environment (ME) of Nigeria. In specific terms, the Colonial Marine Department was charged with handling the following responsibilities on behalf of the Royal Navy:

- The management and administration of Nigerian ports
- Policing and securing the inland water ways of Nigeria
- Performing the duties of the navy by protecting the territorial waters of Nigeria.<sup>24</sup>

By 1893, the Marine Force had expanded that it was renamed- the Southern Protectorate Marine Force. By 1900, there was a Northern equivalent, established to perform the same duties as the southern marine, in the water ways of northern Nigeria. However, by 1914, following the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates to form one colonial administration under a new country Nigeria, both the southern and northern marine forces were merged to form the Nigerian Marine Force.<sup>25</sup> The responsibility of the new Nigerian Marine among other things included the administration of the ports and harbours, dredging of channels, buoyage and lighting, ferry services, touring launches and other small craft that plied the various creeks and inland water ways of Nigeria. At that time, the Royal Navy still provided the necessary military security as part of its overall military defence of the British Empire.

When World War 1 broke out, the newly formed Nigerian Marine had its baptism of fire when it was deployed to fight in Cameroon as part of the British military offensive against German held territories in Africa. However, in 1955, the British colonial administration in a bid to improve efficiency embarked on an extensive re-organization of Nigeria's maritime administration. This resulted in the establishment of three new agencies to undertake the various functions hitherto carried out by the Nigerian Marine. These agencies were,

- The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA), charged with the running of ports and ensuring safe navigation,
- The Nigerian Inland Waterways Department, established to run the ferries and touring launches,
- The Nigerian Naval Force.<sup>26</sup>

### **A Brief History of the Nigeria Air Force**

The Nigerian Air force is the third arm of the Nigerian military. It was the last of the three to be established. It was created principally to give the Nigerian military sufficient air power so as to project Nigeria's military might around Africa, and particularly the West African sub-region, as well as to give Nigeria prestige among the committee of nations.<sup>27</sup>

The need to create a viable Air force for Nigeria became imperative in the immediate post-independence era following the involvement of the Nigeria military some international peace keeping missions, where Nigeria contingent relied on the Air force of foreign countries for air lifting operations. This operational and logistics challenge particularly came to the fore in the peace keeping missions in Tanganyika (1959) and Congo (1960).<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, the Nigerian government, in 1962, began to implement plans to establish the Nigerian Air Force (NAF). By July 1962, the first batch of cadet were enlisted from the

Nigerian Army and sent for training in Ethiopia. In February 1963, a second batch of 16 officers was sent to the royal Canadian air force, while 6 others were sent to India.<sup>29</sup>

However, on April 18 1964, the legislative Act on the establishment of the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) was passed into law, given the Nigerian Air force a legal backing. The Act stated "there shall be established and maintained in and for the Federal Republic of Nigeria and air force to be known as the Nigerian air force".<sup>30</sup>

### **Reason for military intervention in Nigeria politics**

The military intervened in Nigeria politics for the following reasons:<sup>31</sup>

#### **A. Social Factors**

1. **Ethnicism:** the foundation of ethnic rivalry was laid before independence when the political parties with the exception of the NCNC were formed on ethnic basis. Thus, as the colonial powers were preparing to fold its political umbrella, the parties withdraw into the cocoons of their ethnic bedfellow to inherit power from their colonial master. This intense ethnic rivalry added stress and strain which converged to destroy respect for constitutionalism and rules of political game, hence laying the foundation for the events that culminated in military rule and the consequent coup d'etat. The July, 1996 Coup d'etat testifies to this.
2. **Endemic Political Crisis:** as a result of political ineptitude of the leaders, political power became as access to key levels of the country. The leadership uses the state to manipulate jobs and contracts for themselves and their followers, in-laws and friends. This facilitated the emergence of a new class of people who displayed their newly acquired wealth with reckless abandon, while they show little concern for the plight of the citizens who live in abject of poverty. Necessary attempts like good roads, water supply electricity and health facilities were lacking. This created an atmosphere of insecurity and deflated the legitimacy of the civilian elite.
3. **Cumulative Economic Crisis:** political independence alone did not allow Nigerians to break through the vicious circle of poverty and independence. The Government alone was the only provider of employment. There were not enough industries to employ the mass school leavers and graduates. Regionalism and ethnicism became modes of perception and organization for getting ones share of national cake. There was constant flow of contestants for the few top positions and top salaries. Many soldiers were disappointed with what they regarded as 'too slow pace of economic' conditions. The economic crises escalated as, nepotism, bribery and corruption was the order of the day.

#### **B. Intra-Military Factors:**

1. **Professionalism:** a highly professional Army concentrates on its function and ignores politics. In Nigeria, the military lacks this sense of professionalism. They rather see themselves as messiah who was destined to save the people from political doom, hence the constant coup.
2. **Reference Group Theory:** training the Officer corps abroad led to imbibing the core value of the host country and if these values were non-existent in the mother country, frustration results. In Nigeria most of the officer cadets were all Saudi Arabia trained.
3. **Tension in the Barracks:** this was as a result of functional redundancy. Nigeria soldiers had no heroic history of war to Romanize about. This created a sense of anomie and so the military go beyond to create a sense of achievement through constant coups.
4. **Contagion Effect:** Ruth First has opined that what the military of a state do today, their next door neighbours may do tomorrow.<sup>32</sup> Since independence, states have become part of inter-acting sub-systems for regional economic, political and other purposes. They

cooperate and they intervene directly or indirectly in one another's affairs for instance, Nzeogwu of Nigeria and Afifa of Ghana were coursemates as Saud hurts.

5. Political use of the Army: The use of the army for domestic political purposes such as suppression of riots could encourage military intervention. In 1964, the army was used to suppress the TIV Riot, thus politicising the army. In 1964, the Northern Nigeria premier requested for troops to be sent to TIV Division to quell political riot without clearance from the army Headquarter in Lagos. The commanding officer of the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion, whose troops were to be sent, opposed the move insisting, on the need for proper procedure. He not only failed to stop the move, but was immediately relieved of his command and posted to Lagos on orders of the Premier.
6. Concentration of Military Installation in the North: Maduebo showed that the concentration of almost all military equipment and installation in one region generated suspicion since it was not a mere coincidence. For example, out of the twenty military installations sixteen were in the North, three West and one in the East.

#### C. Quota System/Federal Character

The introduction of quota system and Federal Character in the method of recruitment into the army further aggravated the politicization of the army. Thus, according to Maduebo, whenever new recruits were needed for the army, Northern Nigeria would provide 60%, Eastern and Western Nigeria 15% each, Mid-Western 10%, military officers became politically conscious so as to get promotion and appointment

#### D. Miscellaneous causes

##### Immediate Causes

1. The 1962 Western Region Crises: this has been described by Oyeleye Oyediran as a sign post to disaster.<sup>33</sup> Thus according to Oyediran, Awolowo's failure to become the Prime Minister can legitimately be regarded as the original cause of Action Group Crisis of 1962 and the accompanying treason trial against Awolowo as leader of opposition who criticised the government of Tafawa. The rift between Awolowo and Akintola widened as the later identified with the NPC, a move which Awolowo felt was selling out the Yorubas. On 25 May, 1962, a riot broke-out in the legislative Chamber between supporters of Akintola and Awolowo's faction. A state of emergency was declared by the Federal government and Dr. Majekodumi was appointed administrator with full powers. A Commission of inquiry headed by Justice Coker was set up to investigate the financial and investment policies of six western.
2. Regional Government Statutory Corporations: the recommendations of the commission were: (a) the Western Nigeria Marketing Board should take over immediately all properties of the National Investment and Properties Company Ltd. (b) the Board should take steps to recover from the Action Group a sum of over N8, 000,000.00 which Action Group had received from the National Investment and Properties Company between April 18, 1958 and May 31, 1962. On November 2, 1962 Chief Awolowo and 26 other persons were accused of conspiring to overthrow the Federal Government by force. This was because on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962 the police had searched a house at Mushin near Lagos and found a number of firearms including sub-machine gun etc. Again on October 5, 1962, the police also reported to have found three stores of firearms in the home of Action Group leader. This made it imperative that Chief Awolowo and 26 others were charged to court on treason trial and conspiracy. On September 11, 1963 Mr, Justice Sowemimo found 18 of the accused guilty and sentenced them to terms of imprisonment while Awolowo backed 10 years

3. The Census Controversy (1962-1964): the Western Region and Eastern had hoped that the May, 1962 census would alter the balance of Northern domination in their favour. This was not to be because all the regions inflated their figures. This was rejected by T. Warren, the British officer in charge. A repeat performance produced no better result, Akintola's government accepted it, the North accepted while Okpara rejected the figure. Osadebe later accepted it for the sake of National Unity and tranquillity. Thus, the hope of breaking the dominance of power by the Northern hegemony through census was dashed.
4. The 1964-1965 Federal Election: during this election, two major alliances were formed to contest. There was Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) made up of NPC and NNDP (Nigerian National Democratic Party), Mid-west Democratic Front and Dynamic Party. The United People's Grand Alliance (UPGA) was made up of the NCNC, the A.G., NEPU and United Middle Belt Congress. The election was marked by rigging, thuggery, bribery, and corruption, intimidation and so on. Some political parties were prevented from campaigning in some parts of the country only to make it possible for the ruling party to be returned unopposed. UPGA boycotted the elections, the boycott was maintained in the West and East and a failure in the North. Dr. Azikiwe threatened that he would rather resign than appoint the Prime Minister. For three days there was no government. With the intervention of Sir Louis Mbanefo and Sir Adetokumbo Ademola, Dr. Azikiwe re-appointed Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister. A national broad-based government was formed. This election heightened the fear and suspicion of Northern domination and ethnic rivalries. The army got enmeshed in this ethnic politics.
5. The 1965 Western Regional Election: this was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The Yoruba had hoped to remove Akintola Government through the ballot box. Massive fraud, rigging and corruption were prominent during this election. The Action Group (AG) had no chance with the NNDP which was Akintola's ruling party. The electoral officers went into hiding as they were subjected to, beating and intimidation. The attempt by the Action Group to use the Law Court to stop the rape on democracy failed. To the Yorubas, the continued imprisonment of Awolowo meant their imprisonment, and one of the solutions was to install Action Group in the West. Both parties claimed victories. Alhaji Adengbenro, deputy leader of the Action Group and leader of the UPGA attempt to form an interim government led to rioting, looting and killing. While the West was burning Tafawa Balewa was busy entertaining the common-wealth Ministers. The call by the University of Ibadan students to declare a state of emergence fell on deaf-ears. By the end of October 1965, the political climate in the country was tense. On January 15, 1966 Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu led six other majors, Onwuatuegwu, Emma Ifeanyina, Okafor, Chukwuka, Ademoyega and Nwobosi to end the corrupt regime of Tafawa Balewa. This coup ushered in the endless military coup in Nigerian Politics. The "bullet box" has relegated the ballot box into obscurity, and democracy was kicked brutally to a fatal future. The coup was successful in the North where Nzeogwu took command himself, partially successful in Lagos and West but not successfully in the East as politicians went into hiding. There were many casualties especially in the North and Lagos among whom were Tafawa Balewa (Prime minister) Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Northern Nigeria) and others. Nzeogwu later surrendered to Major General Aguiyi Ironsi who became the Head of State as the most senior officer in the army
6. Events After: The New Politicians in Khaki Uniform tried to cope with the problems which had plagued the Nigerian political system. It took Major General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi five months to centralize political power in Nigeria. The regions were abolished and groups of provinces introduced a unitary form of government. Feeling grossly threatened by this action, the North reacted violently in one of the bloodiest form of communal instability



this country has ever witnessed, through massive killing of Igbo. Then came the second coup of July 1966 which was the North's vengeful coup. From then on, the political crises took on additional dimensions of hostility between the Eastern and federal government. At the instance of General Ankrah of Ghana, Nigerian leaders met at Aburi in January, 1967. This led to a new political experiment in Nigeria's search for appropriate form of government. On March 17, 1967, Nigerian leaders found that they had to grapple with a confederal system as introduced by decree No. 8, 1967. Gowon created 12 State in Nigeria, thus attacking effectively one of the basic problems of Nigeria's federal structure. But it came on the eve of Biafran secession and did not solve immediate political problems but had long term effects. The country was thrown into a thirty-month civil war which ended on 11th January 1970.

### **The Military in Nation-Building**

1. **Endemic Crises:** in Nigeria, Military rule cannot be said to be a resounding success as far as nation building is concerned. The first military regime in Nigeria was that headed by Major General Aguiyi Ironsi after Major Nzeogwu's coup. He assumed the reins of government at a very trying period of the nation to restore law and order. He promulgated thirty-three decrees within a short period in his anxiety to arrest the crises of national confidence and identity. It was for this reason that Ironsi enacted Decree No. 34 which sought to set aside the Federal arrangement for a Unitary System. Essentially, it would appear that the thrust of Ironsi's political programme centred mainly on administrative mechanism ensuring national cohesion. Nzeogwu's coup and the proceeding event had generated so much distrust and insecurity that required measures to unite the country. This may have informed Ironsi's much maligned unification Decree. The regime was characterized by a disturbing indication and a non-preparedness for the task of governance. Ironsi's attempt to force unitary system of government stirred up suspicion which prompted the Northern element to terminate his government. This was followed by internal strife and the consequent coup which brought Gowon to power. The Gowon regime successfully prosecuted a costly civil war which he helped to create. Babangida's inefficiency to hand over to a democratically elected government on June 12, 1993 threw the country into strife and riot, in which many people were killed. They were supposed to defend. The issue itself created a lot of problem as the southerners felt more alienated from the power struggle. Thus the army far from arresting disunity and disintegration has accelerated it. The armies have shown that they can be as prone to divisional loyalties as our politicians.
2. **Lack of Active Participation by the Citizens:** Elaigwu has pointed out that the process of nation building involves widening the horizon to accommodate others. Under the military, the opportunity for active participation by the citizen is greatly reduced. Gowon rationalised his coming into power by saying that "another Northerner now occupies the most powerful seat" His policy during this period alienated the Igbo. Obasanjo fraternized with the Northern elites. Thus, they and their allies in the West controlled Federal corporations. They used this and other state apparatuses to ensure undiluted polarization and even fight from the public. Buhari's regime enabled this group to corner as much national wealth to themselves as possible through oil business on the spot Market. In all these regimes, some sections of the Nigerian populace were neglected. Thus the issue of sharing and belongings which are essential ingredients in Nation-Building have not been addressed.
3. **Political Instability:** Military Regime according to Luckham could not restore stable and democratic government, because once in power, the military leadership tend to soak up

social conflicts like a sponge as shown in the July, 1966 coup. The military have disrupted political evolution. The constant coups and counter coups do not make for a country's stability and efficient governance. Babangida's power politics reached its climax when he annulled the election reputed to be the best election ever held in this country. In the 26 years of military rule, the country has been a giant laboratory of political programmes. The country inherited a Parliamentary Democracy and later abandoned it for a Presidential system. The military have also given the country three new constitutions in 1979, 1989 and 1995 respectively. These constitutions are yet to be promulgated. The party systems were not left out. At independence, Nigeria operated a multi-party system. Obasanjo retained the system but Babangida approved a two party system. Presently, the multi-party system has been adopted. The result of all these is that no system has been fully experimented upon. There is no political ideology and political culture and this has ultimately led to political instability, hence the process of Nation building has been disrupted.

4. **National Unity:** To an extent, the Military has succeeded in restoring national unity through its successful prosecution of thirty months war. Gowon's policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction after the civil war is a right step in the direction of National Unity. How far this was carried out is a thesis for another paper. However, certain issues in Nigerian politics that threaten national unity have remained unresolved. Such issues like National Census two times -1973 and 1991 and yet could not come out with a reliable figure. The creation of more states and local governments has provided impetus for economic and political growth. It has reduced the crises of political domination in several parts of the country. Nevertheless, the issue of stateism seems to be widening the gap for National Unity. The issue of quota system and federal character has widened the gap between groups in Nigeria. The average Nigerian child sees himself first as an Hausa/Igbo/Yoruba/Tiv/Igala, etc. second as an indigene of his state considering whether he is a Nigerian. Thus, Nation Building is a far cry.

## Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it could be said that military in Nigerian politics, over the years has exhibited a paradoxical trend of conflict and cooperation between the Nigeria's military elite and civilian political elites. This, as the work has shown, has been largely a consequence of deep-seated political, economic and ethno-religious factors which have influence and shaped the historical development of the country right from political independence in 1960. The long years of military rule in the country establish the military as the strongest and most powerful political group in the country. Consequently, even after the withdrawal of the military from politics in 1999, the new democratic dispensation that emerges was dominated by ex-service men, mainly retired. Generals who amassed so much wealth, power and influence during the years of military rule, that they literally controlled political outcome in the three tiers of government. In fact, as one analyst puts it, for the first 10 years of the fourth republic, mostly retired generals contested to occupy the presidency. In 2003 alone, over 6 retired generals indicated interest for the presidency on the platform of different political parties. As a result, the 2003 presidential election was humorously styled "the game of generals" by the press.<sup>34</sup> On the issue of defence sector management, the opacity and bureaucratic bottlenecks entrenched over the years by military rule, created an enormous challenge of public accountability and transparency in security sector governance in democratic Nigeria. This also could be said to be one of the major factors responsible for the weak parliamentary oversight of the defence sector as well as the difficulties experienced by the present democratic government in subjecting the military, to object democratic control. Thus, for Nigeria, to

experience stable civil-military relations, that will not only preserve the present democratic dispensation, but sustain it beyond the possibility of a sudden reversal, subsequent effort to reform the defence/ security sectors must go beyond the traditional approach of focusing on the armed forces alone, to identifying, analysing and proffering sustainable solutions to the ethno political wrangling as well as other non-military threats to the country's socio-political stability. Until this is done, the quest for stable civil military relations and the consolidation of democratic governance in Nigeria, would be a recurrent problematique

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> C. A. Ndoh, "Örigin and Development of the Nigerian Army" in C. E. Emezi and C. A. Ndoh (eds) *The Military and Politics in Nigeria*, Qwerri: Achigo Publications Ltd, 1997. 8

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<sup>3</sup> Claude E. Weleh Jr. *Soldier and State in Africa*, Evanson: North – Western University Press, 1970.

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