

## The Impact of Military Coup D'état on Political Development in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The military is not by inclination trained to rule, but to defend. But when the situation arises which brings them into the corridors of power, it is an aberration. The diarchy which thus ensures makes for strains and stresses. However, taking into consideration the nature of their calling, a dedicated and disciplined military could bring sanity into the body politics of a nation. Indeed, the various controversial military coup d'état might be undesirable, but it was not unexpected. It might have done some harm to Nigeria political development, yet it recorded some successes. It is in this wise, that this paper in the main, examines the impact of military coup d'état on the political development of Nigeria. It argues that, military coup d'état was not a total failure and disaster as most political and historical scholars had painted the scenario. The paper, relying mainly on secondary sources, examines the remote and immediate causes as well as the aftermath of military coups on Nigerian political development. The paper concludes that military interventions via coups were not entirely 'wasted years', but created some new management elites who contributed a lot to the economic, social and political developments of the country. The paper however, recommends good governance (embedded in the principle of democracy and the rule of law) as a panacea to military coup d'état in Nigeria.*

### 1. Introduction

The military is a peculiar organization in several respects. It is a bureaucratic organization, with excessive emphasis on hierarchy, centralization, discipline, and obedience to higher commands, rapid communications and esprit de corps. The military organisation, have certain values, attributes, and characteristics such as uniforms, separate barracks and some detachment from society. The military is an institution that utilizes and manages violence. The military organization and its resources is one measure of the power of a state. The organization strength of the military along with her control of arms and trained men, make the military a powerful public institution in all states.

The fifty-five years of independence for Africa's most populous nation have not been easy. Welding such diverse community into a single nation with a stable political process is still at an early stage despite its advantages in oil resources, good- agricultural land, and a solid core of well-educated citizens. Many Nigerians say that if there is any good coming out of all that bad years of military dictatorship and ineffective civilian governance, it is the fact that they have made enough mistakes to learn meaningful lessons from them. This paper shall proceed slowly, to examine the impact of military coup d'état on the political development of Nigeria. But before then, let us quickly take a look at how military values and norms are transmitted into the society through a number of channels after supplantment.

### 2. Military Values and Norms.

The military as an organization has its values and norms, which has made it a unique organization. These values and norms are transferred to the larger society during military governance. The adoption of these values and norms within a democratic setup is hereby referred to as the dialectics of military governance. In the exposition of the military values and norms, it was observed that the military is a puritanical organization, and that the training which men receive in this institution and subsequent military experience imbues them with austere attitudes and a high sense of discipline and responsibility. The universalistic character of achievement orientation in the award of honors and promotion is said to be endemic in the military.

Thus, the values of Puritanism, discipline, rationality and achievement orientation of the military are assumed to be much more directly relevant to change and development (Odetola 1982) as against the descriptive value orientation of the rest of social organizations in African society. It is perhaps these values, which enabled the military in Nigeria to be able to execute the various National Development Plans in Nigeria. It is no news that the best National Development Plans in Nigeria were conceived and executed by the military. They gave birth to the most enduring infrastructures in Nigeria today. It has been said that the education and training, which soldiers receive, make them professional men. It is also assumed that such acquired values or attributes are transferable into situations or occupational roles, which may not be entirely military. The third assumption is that in the process of governing a civilian society, these military values are transmitted to the rest of the society in a way that regulates societal behavior and consequently changes such societies (Odetola 1982).

The point here is that, the long years of military rule, made the boundaries between the barracks and the civil society so permeable that the ethos of the military affected the entire society. The outcomes were that, at the entry of the civilian government, politicians had adapted to the command system of the military, which they have been subjected to considerably. Consequent upon the long years of military governance, the obvious outcome would be militarized political culture, manifested in the political behaviors of the dramatis personae in a democratic arena. The Nigerian civic culture was eroded and militarized culture imbibed. Thus, the rule of operation became that of order, combat rather than dialogue, disregard to court orders and violation of human rights became the tenets of militarized civic culture under a democratic dispensation. These values and norms are unknown to democracy. Democratic values include; spiritual or moral principles, ideals or qualities of life that people favor for their own sake. Democracy is rooted in several key values, or norms. These values supply democracy's moral content and give its institutions and procedures their normative purpose, as Sodaro (2008) said, these include; freedom, inclusion, equality, equity, welfare, negotiation and compromise.

### ***3. Evolution of the Nigerian Military***

The origin of what is today recognized as the Nigerian military is traceable to the diverse local forces raised in the second half of the 19th century. This was the handiwork of British Colonial Administration in Nigeria. The first of the local forces was known at inception as "clovers' Hausa" or "Hausa IVlilitia". This was later changed to "Lagos Constabulary", and was formed by Sir John Clover in 1862 in his capacity then as the administrator of Lagos. The second was called the "Royal Company Constabulary" formed in 1886 to cater for the protection of the British trading interests in Northern Nigeria. Between 1891 and 1892, a third one was raised by Ralph Moore as the Oil Rivers irregulars". It was later renamed "the Niger Coast Constabulary". These were local forces raised from time to time to attack and to forestall local dignity, solidarity and internal security, especially as different tribal wars were finding their footings around the said period under review.

In 1897 however, Fredrick Lugard raised the West African Frontier Force. After the revocation of the charter of the Royal Niger Company in 1900, Lord Lugard combined a fragment of their force with the West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F) to establish the Northern Nigeria Regiment (N.N.R). This was a period when Lord Lugard had already taken over the administration of Nigeria. Following the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914, Lugard fused all the Nigerian forces together and named it the Nigerian Regiment of the West Africa Frontier Force. This was the first attempt aimed at evolving the Nigerian Military. Although what is today known as the armed forces were called constabularies, but they were largely organised, trained and were disciplined military units under the command of regular army officers.

Nevertheless, in spite of the grown up body known as the Nigeria Regiment, it was on the 28th of December, 1922 that an ordinance constituting the Nigerian Regiment of West Africa Frontier Force (Nigeria Regiment) came to force. Following Achike's reasoning, "this ordinance made comprehensive provision for order, discipline, government, and discharge and service condition of military personnel and certainly would be regarded as the foundation of the subsequent legislation passed in Nigeria on military offers. The point of emphasis here is that, although the local forces that existed before these constabularies were largely unorganized, and seemingly indisciplined, they provided the bases for an organized military in Nigeria, while the constabularies that were organized provided grounds for the ordinance of 1922. In 1956, the Nigerian Regiment which formed part of the Royal West African Frontier was re-named Nigerian Military Force, Royal African Frontier force. This existed for four years. In 1960, Nigeria became independent on October 1. This ushered in the Nigerian Military Forces in recognition of the legal status and position of the Crown, "Queen of Nigeria".

The military took directives from the queen. Also judicial matters were still largely dependent on the Queen. For instance, a judgment of the supreme court of Nigeria could still be appealed against in the Privy Council in England. The Nigeria military then was still largely under the control and influence of the Queen of England. But with Nigeria becoming a republic in 1963, the Nigerian military forces were renamed, and thereafter designated Nigerian military forces. The evolution of the Nigerian Military followed very closely, the political history of the country. It started from the pre-colonial period, through colonial era to the time when Nigeria became a Republic in 1963. The only sharp differences that could be drawn from the different evolutionary stages are that, in pre-colonial times, there were only local forces. These local forces were wholly localized, wholly unorganized, and overly pre-occupied themselves fighting wars with bows and arrows, shield, which were no match with the sophisticated guns and machine guns. During the colonial era however, the forces that existed were organized, but did not provide a patriotic fountain for an accelerated march towards oneness of purpose. In other words, the forces that existed during the colonial era was so established under different governors and predominantly restricted to their ethnic enclaves.

Lastly, when Nigeria became a Republic in 1963, an effective Nigerian Military came on board. It was at this time that the Nigeria Military began to be as one entity with directives arising from the commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.

#### ***4. The Role of the Military.***

Section 197(1) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria talks elaborately on the functions of the Military. According to that section, the functions of the Army are to:

- (a) Defend Nigeria from external aggression;
- (b) Maintain its territorial and security borders from violation,
- (c) Suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president and
- (d) Perfecting such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

According to Ikelegbe, A.O (1995), the military has been instituted for defence needs to perfect and defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a state. To him, “Nations build and invest in their men, technology! And resources to equip the military to defend the state against the ambitions, interventions and aggressions of other states.

The military is to protect, project and be instrumental to the pursuance of the interests of the state. Military organization is the chief instrument in interstate relations in furtherance of state interests. States from time to time, deploy the military strategy to cow, over-awe, threaten, and coerce other states to submission in defence or projection of their interests. From the early periods of the evolution of the state, the military has been captured, deployed to foreign bases or countries and threatened or carried out warfare to protect state interests. The organization of the military has been the ultimate or internal last resort, to maintain law, peace and order in the state. The army could be deployed by governmental authorities, in serious cases of breakdown of law and order, intense riots, internal insurrection, civil rebellion and secession. Thus the army also plays a role in the protection of the state from within or maintenance of internal stability. In all these, military is not trained to rule but to defend the territorial integrity of a nation. But when they take over the reigns of government by coercive means through coup d’etat, it is an aberration. In the light of the above, we shall quickly examine what is Coup D’etat?

#### ***5. What Is Military Coup D’etat?***

Coup is an original French conception meaning blow. But generally, it means a “highly successful stroke, act or move: a clever action or accomplishment”. The term coup d’etat, also French, literally means a “blow, or stroke, concerning the state”. In politics however, it means a “sudden and decisive action, especially one affecting a change of government illegally or by force”. In other words, a coup d’etat, as given in this definition, is characterized by “suddenness”, “decisiveness”, “illegality”, and “force”.

To Edwin Madunagu (2008), a coup d’etat is “a violent and unexpected reformation of state policy” or “unexpected and sudden measure of state often involving force or threat of force”. When actual force is used, it is usually “localized” or “concentrated” or both. The group involved in the exercise of the force is usually small. Another elaboration of the meaning of coup d’etat is a “sudden change of governmental or nobility power”. Therefore, a coup d’etat is a political act, it is armed politics.

A coup d'état may be staged against a state or government and this is the commonly known phenomenon. But it can also be staged by a state or government as represented by the head of that government. For instance, if a government violates the constitution of its own basic law or decree, and goes on to enforce this violation by the employment of any coercive apparatus of state, then that government has staged a coup d'état. It is in this sense that the following acts in the political history of Nigeria can be considered as coup d'état. One is the dissolution of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) by General Ibrahim Babangida in January, 1990, and the constitution of a new one; the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election; and the military expedition sent by president Olusegun Obasanjo to Odi in November, 1999 without senate approval. A famous example from history is the coup staged by president Charles Louis Napoleon Bonaparte of France. He was elected president in 1848, he unilaterally extended his powers and then made himself Emperor two years later. This was a coup against the state staged by the head of state. Governments that declares a state of emergency, effect changes in the composition structure and operation of state institutions, and enforce these measures by means outside the provisions of the constitution or basic law, has staged a coup d'état.

### **6. Coup D'état in Nigeria since Independencen:**

This can be classified into five categories viz:

- Coups d'état proper, that is successful overthrow of government, whether or not the group that initiated the action actually assumed power;
- Coups by the state or government against the basic law or the civil society;
- Attempted coup d'état where there were overt actions, but the initiative failed in their bid to overthrow the government;
- Conspiracy to stage a coup d'état, where there were only allegations by the state that certain people were planning a coup d'état;
- Political allegation of conspiracy to stage a coup d'état, where the allegation was made, not by the state, but by individuals whose allegations were however, not contradicted by the state. This could be the broad and rough classification of the different coups d'état that have taken place in Nigeria.

#### ***i. The Coups proper or successful Coups are:-***

- January 1966 — General Aguiyi Ironsi
- July 1966 — General Yakubu Gowon
- July 1975 — General Muhammed Murtala
- December 1983 — General Muhammed Buhari
- August 1985 — General Ibrahim Babangida
- November 1993 — General Sani Abacha

#### ***ii. The attempted Coups d'état in Nigeria are as follows:***

- January 1966—Major Nzeogwu
- February 1976 — Lt. Col. Dimka
- April 1990 — Major Orkah

#### ***iii. Conspiracies to stage a coup as alleged are;***

- October 1962 — Chief Obafemi Awolowo
- September 1967 — Colonel Ifeajuna, Biafra
- December 1985 — General Mamman Vasta
- March 1995 — No clear leader
- December 1997 — General Diya Oladipo

#### ***iv. Political allegation of Coup plans include:***

- January 1965 — no clear leader
- June 1998 — no clear leader.

One of the most prominent coup d'état by the state against the basic law and the civil society was the annulment by General Ibrahim Babangida's regime of the June 12, 1993 presidential election in Nigeria. This is the chronology of Military Coups d'état in Nigeria. But what are the general reasons normally put forward for military incursion into politics?

### **7. Causes Of Military Incursion Into Politics.**

Than countries where these factors are absent In Nigeria, the state of the economy was one of the One may begin by seeing military intervention as partly a product of crisis development. It is promoted and engendered by the corporate and bureaucratic orientation of the military and the social-political and economic environment under which they operate. Sometimes, it is goaded by organizational and college conflicts within the military and aggravated by internal rivalries and struggle within the military establishment in the quest for position, office and status on the one hand, and that between the military and post-independence civilian regimes on the other. The chances of intervention have often been increased by a combination of corporate threat, intra-class rivalry and bitter competition among politicians and the bureaucratic struggle of modern civil-military elites. Some exponents believe that a coup d'état is the last resort in the range of means whereby an unpopular government may be overthrown. After each coup, different explanations are usually given for the intervention. To understand the causes of military interventions, one needs to look beyond official explanations given by the planners because they are self-serving and they do not tell the whole story.

According to Professor S.E. Finer (1962), the reasons for military intervention in politics include: concern for national interest, regional-ethnic communal interest of the planners and personal interest of the coup plotters. He argues further that the military is likely to intervene in countries with low political culture than those with high political culture. In countries with low political culture, political structures have not been well institutionalized and the dominant political norms and the rules of the game have not been sufficiently internalized. The Nigeria situation fits squarely into this categorization or explanation. Janowitz, Morris (1962), in his "The professional soldier: A social portrait" postulated what is generally regarded as the "internal characteristics model". In his model, he argues that military intervention can be explained by reference to the internal structure of the military, the social background of the officers, still structure and career lines, internal social cohesion and cleavages. He adds that professional and political ideology within the military is important factors which help to explain direct military intervention in politics. However, valid this model may be, it does not apply to the Nigerian structure. This is more so, as military coups in Nigeria are devoid of any meaningful ideological orientation.

In his own work, Professor Samuel Huntington based his explanation for military intervention in politics on the contention that "military explanations don't explain military interventions and that the most important causes of military interventions in politics are political. Huntington contends that military interventions in developing countries is only one specific manifestation of the general politicization of social forces and institutions, Military intervention is likely in societies where most social forces and institutions are highly politicized such that we have political universities, political labor unions, political bureaucracies and political armed forces. There is no doubt that during the first republic (1960-1966) the Nigerian military was politicized to a very large extent.

According to David Jemibewon, a Nigerian retired military officer; there are five reasons for military intervention in politics in Africa and the third world countries. These include:

- Inability of the civilians to govern;
- Corruption of political leaders;
- Absence of peaceful change of government;
- Tendency on the part of army officers to emulate their colleagues who had staged coup in other countries;
- Personal ambition on the part of officer corps.

In a related development, Samuel Decalo argued that, two factors motivate military intervention in politics. The first factor is the societal weakness, institutional fragility, systematic flaws and low level of political culture. These anomalies he points out tend to act as a sort of magnetic pull of the armed forces into power and legitimacy vacuum. The second factor, Decalo based on organizational theory of the Africa's military hierarchy, certain characteristics of professionalism, nationalism, cohesion, and austerity that impel them to political circle and the desire to redeem their country from the clutches of corruption and egocentric politicians (Decalo, 1973, p.115).

Another writer on military intervention in politics who argued in a similar vein is Cartridge W.F. He sees military take-over in Africa to reflect "urban and intellectual underdevelopment within recently independent states, while at the same time, a product of a particular military sub-community and their leaders". Although Cutteridge believes on the potency of economic stagnation, depressed standard of living, political schisms and general disillusionment as propelling factors to military interventions, he adds that the military has specific skills and it is the exploitation of these skills by politicians that makes it possible for them to intervene in politics.

*Thus, the reason for military intervention in politics can be aptly summarized as follows: -*

Professionalism of the military force appears to be a major reason and cause of military intervention in politics. According to Professor Huntington and Samuel Decalo, a highly professionalized army is expected to be an army dedicated to its job and uninterested in politics. The more the army establishes its devotion to the acquisition of military knowledge, expertise and technique, the less it will be inclined to question civilian values. Professional army officers are more interested in making the system work rather than in questioning its values. This is the opinion of Professor B.J Harris “an army which is an obedient army of the state is politically sterile. If the armed forces of any state are highly professionalised, the possibility of members of the armed forces interfering in politics is remote, while the reverse is the case if the armed forces are not professional. Thus, lack of professionalism of the Nigerian military brought about the incessant coups witnessed in Nigeria between 1966 and 1993. One may then begin the reason why professionalism and return-to-the barrack syndrome is currently being preached among the rank and files of the Nigerian Military.

Another explaining thesis is the politicization of the Nigerian armed forces. This thesis of military intervention in politics is associated with the works of Morris Janowitz and Samuel Huntington. To these authors, the armed forces of most developing countries are recruited from the generation that witnessed the process of decolonization and independence. They have been in the process exposed to the press, radio and television propaganda of the nationalists just like their civilian counterparts. They argued that, although the military live in the barracks, nevertheless, they mix freely with politicians and civilians and know the expectations of the populace. The politicization of the Nigerian armed forces took its root from 1960 when they were been called upon by civilian leaders to perform national duties. For instance, they were used in Congo and Tanzania crisis in 1960 and 1964 respectively. Also, they were called upon to maintain essential services during the 1964 general strike, to maintain peace during the period of emergency in the western region in 1962, and also to check the Tiv riots in 1963. With the reliance of the political leaders on the military to provide these services, it began to dawn on the military that the survival of the country depended on them to a very large extent. It is reasonable to argue that one of the factors responsible for the 1966 coup in Nigeria was the exposure of the military to politics. They intervened when the country was drifting apart and they saw themselves as the Messiah.

Another related thesis used to explaining the reason for military coup d’etat is the personal ambition of some members of the armed forces. A coup occurs not only because of the politicization of the military alone, but because of the inordinate ambition of some members of the armed forces. A good example is the military counter coup masterminded by General Ibrahim Babangida in August 27, 1985 against his colleague, General Buhari to satisfy his personal ambition of a few military officers.

There is also the claim by the military of the decline or decay of the political system. This is normally based on the assumption that whenever the political system is on the verge of collapse, the military is likely to intervene and this is correct of the Nigerian situation. Political schisms were seen as impeding national integration, economic development and social progress. Thus, the military claimed that they came to create a climate for national unity, reconciliation and progress. The thesis of domestic schisms for military intervention is based on the assumption that states which face social and economic crises such as inflation, ethnic conflict, mass unemployment, widespread strikes and mass protest are more likely to experience military intervention factors that led to military intervention of December 1983.

### ***8. Impact of Military Coup D’etat on Political Development in Nigeria.***

In Africa and Latin America, the long years of military rule via coup d’etat have had its own consequences. It has exposed the people to the shortcomings of military rules and manifested in socio-economic and organizational problems of the military itself. These impacts vary to certain degrees in some countries due to some contextual and environmental differences.

Military coup d’etat has always ushered in a military regime, which always had far reaching socio-economic consequences. The very existence of a group of military rulers affects the social climate of a country. Social priorities are altered and the economy is re-oriented, ostensibly for the better. The social status of the military is enhanced and the military becomes an attractive profession owing to the opportunities offered for the exercise of power and influence in the polity. There is therefore, an emergence of a new group of comfortable upper class, a situation that is capable of promoting mass discontent.

On the issue of social integration, the Nigerian experience had shown that the military rulers soon identified themselves with one social group or the other and thus rather than promoting inter-ethnic harmony, they encourage cleavages and compound the problem more than their civilian counter parts. "Infact, the army in many cases began to mirror the very social maladies such as tribalism, nepotism, and class privilege found in the larger society. This in itself slows down very considerably political development in Nigeria. Economic depression is usually one of the orchestrated reasons for military coup d'etat in most African countries. In this context, they often present economic blueprints for development. The structural adjustment programme (SAP) of the Babangida regime in Nigeria is a case study. As a result of the corrupt nature of the military rulers coupled with a corrupt bureaucracy, such economic policies usually leave the people worse than they were before the military intervention. Military coup d'etat has led to increased expenditure on military related projects and welfare to the detriment of development of other economic indicators.

The political consequences of military coup d'etat which result partly from role expansion and partly from the basic ethos of post-colonial military in most developing countries include the following. They include regimented governance, limitation of the opportunities available for the individual voluntary and effective participants in the affairs of the state, alignation and anxiety on the part of the political class. Other factors are the emergence of authoritarian culture which compels people to believe in a particular manner, more out of fear than as a result of genuine interest; selective elites cooperation which limits the masses opportunities of self-development and self-actualization through participation in policy decision-making. Also, the ascendancy of the bureaucracy and intra-class agitation and increased avenue for conflicts and instability. The military in Nigeria had neither provided effective and exemplary leadership nor mass mobilization of the people.

The military class is corrupt. This is a major impact of military coup d'etat on political development in Nigeria. The military had always claimed that they want to eradicate corruption, but under the military, corruption has been institutionalized. During military regimes, corruption flourished very prominently. For example, in Nigeria, the military director of the NYSC was said, through an inquiry in 1985, to have over spent his vote of #64m by #30m in a free-for-all rip-off public treasure". Coup d'etat has provided a platform for the military to institutionalise corruption. According to Nordlinger (1977) the military in many countries have been found with some ill and performance failures, ineptness and corruption which they charged their predecessors of".

According to him, military governments in Africa and Latin America have even been found to be more corrupted compared to civilian governments. Thus, the problem of indiscipline, corruption, ethnic cleavages etc have remained endemic in many societies in spite of military regime made possible by coup d'etats. Military coup d'etat has eroded our political culture and has substituted democracy with dictatorial tendencies. It is instructive to note that Nigeria has spent 29 years of the 55 years since the nation obtained her independence fighting the effects of coups d'etat. The problem created by the military is so enormous. There is therefore an urgent need for a total review of the 1999 constitution to allow for some punitive measures for any coup plotters. Coups d'etat are anti-political development, they are anti-democratic. Both coup against the state and coups by the state must be eliminated and discouraged to further our political development.

In his inaugural lecture in 1993, J.'Bayo Adekanye, a professor of political science, and the then Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan, submitted that "In Nigeria, the legacy of military rule- to-date has resulted in distortion of old parties or equivalences, even while deepening income inequalities, between given occupational groups. A succession of coup regimes has also elevated the military above not just their peers e.g. the police, but even such other professional or occupational groups as the civil servants, doctors, judges, and academics until now ranked much higher in income and status". Coup d'etat has brought about a harvest of military rulers who carted away democratic principles and replaced them with dictatorial tendencies. Thus, "the military has placed very heavy demands on the financial resources of the country, in addition to being sheltered by all sorts of special privileges and economic advantages. Above all, there is the rise to new prominence of the Gowons, the Obasanjos, the Yar'Aduas, and the Danjumas, by which we mean the emergence of increasingly large numbers of top retired military officers as dominant figures in the national economy, including banking and finance, trade and commerce, shipping, petroleum business, large-scale farming as well as various agro-allied ventures, not to add the world of politics and diplomacy.

This is what coup d'etat in Nigeria has done to our political development as a nation.

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