MILITARY ROLE IN CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Nigeria, with over 140 million population, is the largest black nation in the world. Ever since she attained independence in 1960, the country has been bedeviled by numerous challenges, such as military coups. The concept of democracy however, includes majority rules, political equality, the rule of law, constitutionalism, popular sovereignty, privileges, etc. Therefore, the desirability of establishing an acceptable and durable democracy in Nigeria now, is a sine-qua-none, especially, when it is considered that the military has ruled Nigeria for about thirty years out of the fifty-five years of her independence in 1960. It goes without saying however that in spite of a return to civilian rule, the country could only boast of civilian administration rather than democratic governance. This is precisely because the protracted period of military regime has impacted and equally, influenced deeply on the psyche of the citizenry. That is why it is very hard to establish a political culture, and its relevant institutions overnight. Thus, the paper is about trying to shade light on what is supposed to be chemistry between democratic governance and military rule, and the role the military should play in consolidation of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

Keywords: *Military Role, Democracy, Politics, Governance, and Independence.*

Background to the Study

After a protracted period of military rule in Nigeria, a democratically elected government was ushered into power in 1999. Unfortunately, this shift of power and change of governance was followed by discrepancy and clamour for democratic governance that would allow popular participation since the concept of democracy however, includes majority rules, political equity, rule of law, constitutionalism, privileges, etc. This was equally so to mark the end of military meddlesomeness in the politics of Nigeria. Infact, there are many schools of thought that the military is the main cause of Nigeria's socio-economic woes, resulting in retrogressive political and socio-economic stagnation.

The return to democratic rule in 1999, Yoroms (2005:162) posits, therefore, begins a process, which in itself is inadequate to address all the shortcomings in security sector of governance. This is because the constitution did not emerge as a contribution or a popular document generated by and for the people. Rather, it carries with it the symptom and legacy of dictatorship that sets the people in constant confrontation with the state, which the security sector is often invited to tackle, to the disadvantages of the desire and expectation to build sustainable democracy. There are rampant cases of extra-judicial killings, abuse of human rights and abandoned disregard of the constitution by the security agencies and the newly emerged elites. According to Mohammed (2006:8), the need to consolidate the nascent democracy in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. Hence, in spite of a return to democratic rule in Nigeria, a school of thought asserts that there is a civilian administration and not democratic governance. This is because the long period of military rule makes it difficult to establish political culture, overnight, giving the underdeveloped political class, weak political institutions, entrenched culture of primitive accumulation and lack of sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the people. Similarly, many other still blame the military incursions in governance for the slow pace of delivering the dividend of democracy to the people.

Jega (2007:77) opines that indeed, democratic regimes, which have replaced authoritarian ones, have constantly been faced with the threat and possibility of authoritarian reversal. This is essentially because the role that authoritarian regimes, especially the military variety, have played in governance since the attainment of independence in the decade of the 1960s has given rise to so many complex and interrelated processes, most of which have significant negative consequences on governance. These have entrenched and deeply rooted.

The impact of authoritarian rule to democracy and the quest for good governance in the ongoing wave of democratization in the African continent are profound for all countries, which have experienced military rule. But they are especially so for Nigeria, which has had about three decades of military rule, the last fifteen years of which had been continuous, and during which militarism has been deeply entrenched and militarization has taken its toll. In the words of Jega (Op. Cit, 78), they make the process of transition to democracy vexations, democratic consolidation very slow and conflict ridden, and the entire democratic experiment precarious and susceptible to authoritarian reversals. Indeed, they make good governance exceedingly difficult and arbitrary with authoritarianism as a prevailing tendency.

Thus, the desirability of establishing an acceptable and durable democracy in Nigeria now, is a sine-qua-none, especially, when it is considered that the military has ruled this country for about thirty years out of the fifty-five years of her independence in 1960. Hence, the military, without mincing words, has a vital role to play in defending and sustaining our nascent democracy.

The Militarization of Politics/Political Instability:
In the period after independence, Nigeria was plunged into a series of military coups, attempted coups, counter coups as well as a bloody civil war motivated by secessionism, namely the Biafran civil wars. In all, she suffered at least seven military coups and was under military rule for a total of 30 years, interrupted only by a hiatus of one year of civilian rule. The commandist tradition of the military is incompatible with such democratic tenets as negotiation, debate, consultation and accountability. As so, the first effect of military rule was the general truncation of democratic values in the Nigerian society. The civil liberties and other rights were curtailed. The society itself became one huge military garrison, as democratic tradition came under military assault (APRM, 2008:44).

Luckham (1998), cited in Jega (Op. Cit, 80, 81), asserts that initially, in the 1960's and 1970's, political military officers attempted to legitimize their aberrant disposition by invoking popular concerns with probity, accountability and development and tried to sell themselves as well-meaning patriots heading corrective regimes for short periods. They were supported by scholars and ideologies who rationalized military involvement in governance as inspired by the need for either sustaining political order in conflict ridden societies, or for managing modernity and development. Some interventionists began to see themselves as messiahs chosen by the Almighty to rule the country and in the process became exceedingly insensitive, and intolerant of demands made by ordinary mortals.

Opera (2002:48), posits that three factors were responsible for political instability in Nigeria, and these were: the civilian factor, the regional factor and the military factor. According to him, the civilian factor has to do with bribery, corruption, nepotism, tribalism, rabid regionalism and political antagonism. It is no surprise that the late Major Nzeogwu, leader of the first Nigerian Coup d'etat on 15th January 1966, gave the following reasons for the coup in the words: "*Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that keep the country divided so that they can remain in office as Ministers and VIPs of waste, the tribalists, the nepotists. Those who make us look big for nothing in the international circles. We seized power to stamp out tribalism, nepotism and regionalism*".

The regional factor includes the introduction of the "Virgin Soldier" into local politics as exemplified in the use of soldiers to suppress the Tiv Revolts and the Adaka Boro uprising: The division of Nigeria into three regions of North for Hausa/Fulani, the West for the Yoruba and the East for the Igbo, and the extreme regionalism it engendered; the intensive desire for local autonomy by the minority ethnic groups in these three regions; the uneven development between the North and the South reflecting an uneven response to socio-economic factors.

The military factor is not only the deteriorating political conditions that motivated military coups. Personality clashes within the military itself as soon as the Khaki boys venture into politics of governance also contributed to it. Although the 1st coup, the Nzeogwu coup was directly against the civilian government, its lopsided execution led to its being branded an "Igbo coup". Although, the 5th coup was the military against the civilian (The overthrow of Shagari regime by Buhari/Idiagbo), the other 6 coups, involved the military against the military. Thus, the three factors listed above would have been solved had Babangida's lasting Democratic Third Republic Programme Materialized.

By the late 1980's and the 1990's, however, fewer and fewer apologists of military rule can be found, largely due to the failure of successive regimes to fundamentally address the problems of the society. Hence, there has been a general recognition that military involvement in governance in post-colonial Nigeria had resulted in little, if any development in most cases, and in tremendous political turmoil and conflicts, as well as profound squandering of the country's resources. Moreover, it had resulted in the emergence of authoritarian despots with terrible records of gross human rights violations, which had not only personalized power, but the public treasury as well (Jega, Op. Cit, 81).

Political instability in Nigeria, Olisa et al (2010:270), opine, is today one of the major obstacles facing African countries in general and Nigeria in particular. Political instability, in simple terms, refers to the frequent change in the governments of a

state, in such a manner that such changes or upheavals may prevent the smooth progress and continuity of the nation towards the attainment of the desired objectives of politico-economic development. Like many other negative aspects of Nigeria's political life, the seeds of political instability were sown in the country during the colonial period. Since the first military intervention on January 15th, 1966, the country has also witnessed frequent changes of military governments, illustrating the fact that the military institution itself has become so politicized that the military officers have to be often moved politically ambitious than their civilian counterparts.

Thus, the failure of Nigeria to come up with a generally accepted ideals, values and attitudes are the reasons for political instability in the country, thereby resulting in political apathy on the part of the citizenry. The long period of military rule makes it impossible to institutionalize some-worth a political culture, impossible to implement the policies of government. The challenge of institutionalizing mechanisms of government that would meet the needs and aspirations of the people and equally eschew military meddlesomeness is, obviously the main issue confronting the federal government of Nigeria. The implications of political instability and its damaging effects are a major source of concern for those that are interested in the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria.

Reasons why the Military should not go into the Politics of Governance:
As it is the case in many other African countries, good governance has become an exceedingly elusive thing in Nigeria. At all levels of governance, what is decent and good is overtaken by what is crude and ugly. All over Africa, illuminating beacons illustrate the acute crisis of governance graphically. Good, responsive, responsible and accountable governance is required everywhere, in order to harness and develop national resources, as well as meeting the basic needs of the people, but what obtains as the prevailing tendency is bad, irresponsive, irresponsible and dubious modes of governance (Jega, Op. Cit, 78).

Opera (Op.Cit, 33), posits that there are two reasons why the military should not go into politics of governance, and they are: The military mind and its impact on military professionalism. The military profession tends to less idealistic and more pessimistic view of man. The soldier comes to be skeptical of words and promises, and to place certainty only in violence and means of violence. Violence is for him the ultimate guarantee of the social political order. In this respect, he may not, share the optimistic social philosophy of liberalism, for the military mind operates in a chain of command whose members are integrate in a strict relationship of subordinate and super-ordinate. Hence, its authoritarian nature demands that one person decides and the other complies. For this reason, it does not place much value on discussion, negotiation or consensus in the face of aggression.

Thus, when the military mind comes into government, it cannot help acting like a fighting machine. It tends to think in terms of allies and enemies, patriots and subversives, with major policies being conceived as campaigns, complete with mobilization, logistics, offensives and the inevitable sense of urgency. Military rule displaces not only democracy but also participation, and replaces them with legitimating by force.

Its impact on military professionalism, Opara (Op. Cit. 35), opines, that the critics of the military rightly believe that by going into politics of governance, the Nigerian military has expanded its activity into an area peripheral to its main mission of National defence and inimical to its broad tradition of non-involvement in the politics of government. He posits therefore, that the impact also includes, reducing its military professional aspiration, inducing it to perform political duties for which it was not drilled, etc.

The constitutional role of the military all over the world, according to Akamere (2013: 398), is the defense of the territorial integrity of the state against external and sometimes, internal aggression. This mandate does not empower it to assume control of the government for the purpose of discharging its legislative, executive and judicial roles. Agara (2007), cited in Akamere (Ibid, 399), identified the dilemma which most third world countries have to grapple with over the years. This includes, how to achieve an enduring separation of the boundary between a country's political and military life, how to achieve the civil authority's need to control the military; and, finally, the worrisome extent to which the civil state's functions have been usurped by the military.

Ihonvbere (1996: 194), opines that the military's poor records in the task of salvaging the battered policy have depleted the messianic role it arrogated to itself, in different context. If anything and as the experience of Nigeria glaringly shows, most of the saviour regimes turned out to be as bad as the ones they replaced. Added to this is the loss of professionalism suffered by the army, due largely to widespread corruption and the resultant negation of the military values of *esprit de corps, loyalty and discipline.*

According to Agbese et al (1997: 92), the Nigerian military is in danger even to itself. It is no longer a cohesive force. Instead, it is riveted by factions and fractions. The quest for power and personal aggrandizement manifested through coups, counter coups and attempted coups have divided the military against itself. Each new military ruler purges the military of its enemies or political enemies. Consequently, the composition of the military does not reflect military imperatives. Rather, it reflects what an incumbent ruler feels will not pose a serious threat to his rulership.

Therefore, the implications of the military involvement in governance, and the challenge or danger they pose in building up a durable democracy in Nigeria are monumental. Nevertheless, nothing is impossible to achieve if we could abide by the principle of civilian supremacy. The civil should know and love their constitutional rights and duties in order to wholeheartedly resist anybody or group that would go contrary to the constitution, under no circumstances.

Democratic Consolidation

Conceptually, democratic consolidation is about regime maintenance in ways that prevent its potential breakdown. It is associated with regime legitimacy and absence of attitudinal and behavioural challenges capable of ruining the life of the democratic regime. It is, in other senses, about regarding the key political institutions as the only legitimate framework for political contestation, and adherence to democratic rules of the game (King and Logerto, 1996: 162), cited in Umar (2006: 49).

According to Jega (Op. Cit, 141), democratic consolidation, requires strong democratic institutions and democrats with the appropriate democratic value orientations, commitment, patience and resilience to make these institutions sustainable. The effort to build these pillars are daily confronted and challenges by substantial threats, which manifest themselves, for example, in the reckless misrule by elected officials, corrupt practices by public officials, insensitivity to and intolerance of opposing views and perspectives, communal and ethno-religious conflicts and general insecurity of lives and property, all of which create apprehensions about the possibility of authoritarian reversal.

It is argued that, one of the challenges for bringing about good governance and democratic consolidation in Nigeria is that of creating viable and effective networks, strengthening alliances and working relationships amongst the democracy-inclined civil society groups (Jega, Op. Cit, 143).

According to Asiwaju (2000: 130) cited in Babawale (2003: 212), democratic consolidation implies the internalization of democratic culture and the institutionalization of democratic best practices by a policy that has successfully embarked on a democratic transition.

Diamond et al (1999: 13), explain democratic consolidation in the following statements: If a transition to democracy is ever to be achieved and sustained in Nigeria, a deeper transition must somehow be affected from prebendalism to real institutionalism, where the legal and constitutional rules function with effectiveness to constrain behaviour. This will require not simply wise and imaginative

institutional designs of which Nigerians have shown themselves imaginatively capable at times but powerful forces and agencies to enforce them.

Akamere (Op. Cit, 406), has stressed that, to consolidate is to strengthen or make stronger. Democratic consolidation therefore refers to the strengthening of democratic practices and values to the extent that they become resilient and strong enough not to suffer a reverse wave. By a reverse wave, it means a situation where a democratic system suddenly relapses into a dictatorship, autocratic or an authoritarian system.

Thus, by the above statements, democratic consolidation is not all about how democratic structures, institutions, processes and practices are institutionalized and nourished. Importantly, how these ideas are parts and parcel of a given society or groups are all that matters. There is military professionalism as well as a legitimate, effective government. Just like the division of labour where every actor or labourer knows what he specializes on, and sticks to it. The work of the military is to defend the nation from the external and internal aggression while the state government is to govern effectively the state.

Military Role in Consolidating Democracy in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis
The task of consolidating democracy in Nigeria, as other new democracies, is both enormous and daunting. It also, must necessarily involve an array of stakeholders. For the military, reposed with the constitutional role of protecting the country's wellbeing, include the prevention of breakdown of legally established government and other institutional corollaries, it calls for serious commitment (Umar, Op. Cit, 62). It has been long now since the military moved away from the active political engagement to which it veered off over several years. The significance of this departure from what has been continuously regarded as the norm, attests to the recognition of the contemporary reality of universal supremacy of the civilian over military control of the reins of power. According to Umar (Ibid, 62), it goes without saying, that any attempt to come to terms with what role(s) the military can and should play in fostering democratic stability, must hammer on, among other things, the kind or nature of relationship that exist between it and the new civilian leaders on the one hand, and with the society, on the other.

Akamere (Op. Cit, 398), opines that the military question therefore, revolves around the institutionalization of democratic culture among the populace and acceptance of civilian control by the military. The constitutional role of the military all over the world he argues, is the defense of the territorial integrity of the state against external and sometimes, internal aggression. This mandate does not empower it to assume control of the government for the purpose of discharging its legislative, executive and judicial roles.

According to Abdullahi (2007: 1), the military has made positive contribution despite public negative views and shortcomings of the military rule in Nigeria. Focusing on the genesis of military intervention in the body politic of Nigeria, it could be explained with the framework of National obligation and responsibility to intervene in the affairs of governance when due process, accountability and good governance are compromised. The various interventionist moves by the military which culminated into a coup de tat in Nigeria, Abdullahi opined, has been claimed to be informed by the growing discontent of people as a result of socio-economic malady occasioned by mismanagement of resources and consequent loss of confidence on the apparatus and institutions of governance. Thus, the military in Nigeria could be considered as the instrument of check on the excesses of civil governance.

In the era of global quest for good governance and consolidation of efforts to combat poverty and misery, especially in the third world countries, the military has therefore, adhered to the agenda set by the advanced democracies for democratization of National Polity and the subjection of the military into supporting a democratically elected government. It is interesting to observed that Nigeria, is no more a pariah country as it were because the democratically elected government on 29th of May, 2007, marked the first ever transition from democratically elected government to another, uninterruptedly by the military.

The paramount role of the military in sustaining democracy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized in such a nascent and fragile democracy like Nigeria. At this point, it is obvious about the interventionist role of the military in time of crisis and upsurge of events that could have even ruined our nascent democracy. The military as we know is an institution nurtured to protect as its major duty, the territorial integrity of the country. But their functions transcend beyond this in situations where there is a threat to national security. The Nigerian military has performed well in fostering and maintaining security and democratic stability. The military has maintained some level of preparedness for internal security challenges as the nation consolidates its nascent democratic gains and tackles the problems of national integration and resource based crisis. The military has been responsible for securing Nigeria's vital installations, countering threats of insurgency and supporting the Nigeria's Police in containing threats to law and order.

It is a sine-qua-none that Nigeria should reinforce and consolidate the functional responsibilities of the military, but with adequate arrangement for the training and retraining of the Nigerian Police whose sole responsibility is being performed in time of civil unrest by the military. Therefore, the military in a nascent and fragile democracy like Nigeria provides the protection for the structure and operations of

government. They ensure and facilitate the existence of a conducive politico-security arrangement for the smooth execution of policies and peaceful conduct of election (Abdullahi, Op. Cit, 5).

Consolidating democratic governance include among others, observance of human rights, entrenchment of rule of law, accountability of government to the people, transparency in management of the resources of the government, equity in the resource allocation and distribution of income and above all, sustenance of a viable, compact and professional Armed Forces with an efficient national security outfit. In an evolving democratic order like Nigeria, it is posited that a well-equipped and trained police force is needed to adequately provide a conducive, save and secure environment, for propagation of ideals of democratic governance. The political environment under which the nascent democracy of Nigeria thrives is certainly not matured and virile enough to discard the crucial role of the military in the development and consolidation of democratic form of governance. Certainly, sustainability of democracy and its dividends very much depends on how we have been able to adhere to global call and clamour for good governance, rule of law, observance of human right, transparency, accountability, egalitarianism, popular participation and of course, fare and credible elections.

Conclusion and Recommendation
In consideration of the above, the thirst for sustainable democratic governance has been a clarion call for every Nigeria, considering the long period of military dictatorship in this country. It is obvious that there are challenges of our nascent democracy; as such efforts must be made towards a balancing act, whereby a democratic project is put in place to avoid any collapse in the gains already made in the nascent democratization. As a result, it could be opined that consolidating democracy in Nigeria is a two prong approach and efforts of the both civilian government and the military institution, an endeavour that includes technical, management and military aspect, keeping in view the goal of achieving a common objective and national development, peace and security. It is a fact that the military is an indispensible force for achieving somewhat, a sustainable democratic governance in Nigeria. Most importantly, in consideration of the size and knowledge of the Nigerian military; it would rather tantamount to wastefulness if quarantines to the barracks. Their technical skills must be utilized to their fullness for the sake of the nation that had trained and natured the military.

On the other hand, the Nigeria military could occupy itself with what A.I. Opara calls the Secondary Roles. The concept of Secondary Roles for the Nigeria military demands that as part of its traditional role of "managing violence", the military should take on secondary roles in peace time such as;

1. Engineering Projects - like building of roads and bridges, drainages and canals.
2. Ecological Reclamation flood and erosion control channels, with particular reference to some states in the country.
3. Highway Rescue dealing with the high rate of accidents on Nigeria roads.
4. Teaching at either the command primary or secondary schools, or at such services schools as the Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna and the Command and Staff College, Jaji.
5. Second Career Training as an engineer, doctor, lawyer, psychologist, librarian, surveyor, educationist, computer system analyst, accountant, electrician, mechanic, filter, mason, fire-fighter, and so on.

Therefore, the principle of dual professionalism must be applied. This is based on the premise that a professional soldier, as a servant of the state, commits himself primarily to his profession of managing violence while also reaching for a second career that would enable him re-enter the civilian society without the fear of being jobless. This calls for the military authorities encouraging officers and men to acquire second career skills by going for degree programmes in areas that would be relevant to both the military and the society at large.

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