
PRAETORIAN SYNDROME AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Military regimes were prominent features in the political space of Nigeria in the first three decades after Nigeria's independence from colonial rule. Scholars have proffered explanatory theories on the praetorian regimes. However in the last two decades, Nigeria has witnessed uninterrupted civil rule in spite of the fact that the objective conditions (nepotism, corruption, ineptitude governance, poverty, unemployment, etc) facilitating military coup d'etat are very present in Nigeria political space. This study examines the dynamics of Nigerian state and the political elite. The study identified the administrative, economic and military organizational strategy employed by the political elite to undermine the capacity of the military to cease political power through military coups. The study observed that upsurge in establishment of non-state militant groups in contemporary Nigeria is an outcome of political elite inability to use the conventional military to access political power through military coups*

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INTRODUCTION

African continent is arguably the most crisis prone continent in the world. More civil wars have been fought on African continent in the last five decades than in any other continent, (Chad, Nigeria, Ethiopia, (Ogadem war), Morocco (Polisario war); Liberia, Sierra Leona, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda, Angola, Republic of Congo, Algeria and Uganda) to mention a few. Reported incidences of genocide campaigns for achievement inordinate political objectives have been more prevalent on African continent in contemporary history (Alli & Matthews, 1999).

The prevalence of crisis in Africa states is a manifestation of systemic failure arising from the incongruent political structure of African states that was unable to responsibly and responsively meet the dynamics and challenges of the material and historical environment of the states (Afowowe, 1998, p.106). Again, African states political institutions and structure are fragile. Political culture that can make democratic institutions virile, workable and sustainable is still at rudimentary stage of

development. Ethno-religious considerations tended to supplant democratic ethos and value (Nnoli, 1980, p.141).

One immediate consequence of his development is that African state political institutions are very weak (Ake, 1988, p.121). Political regimes can easily be undermined sometimes for reasons that are very mundane (Alli, 2001, p.216). This weak institutional base of African states' regimes has facilitated government instability. More than forty out of the total fifty four African states have experienced military putsch at one time or the other.

African military praetorian regimes have proffered or adduced reasons for their forceful intervention in the political process. The reasons usually given for military intervention in African political space included inept leadership, corruption, nepotism, insensitivity to popular aspirations of people and the need to preserve corporate existence (unity) of African states, among other reasons (Welch Jr. 1970, p.2, Ademoyega, 1981, p 19). What is very instructive is that the military regimes in African states had to transit to one form of democratic rule or other especially in the last three decades (Maier, 2002).

The propensity of African Armies to supplant and dethrone democratic regimes in the last one decade has reduced considerably in Nigeria. For instance, there has not been a single case of military coup d'état in Nigeria in the last twenty-two years (1997-2021). During this period (1997-2021) Nigeria experienced major crisis (Niger Delta militant actions (kidnapping, oil pipe vandalization (live wire of Nigerian economy) (Tell, 2005, p.25), the third term agenda of Obasanjo regime, ethno-religious crisis (Boko Haram, Jos Crisis), President Umaru Yar'Adua illness and crisis of presidential authority (Adeniyi, 2011, p.157) established cases of monumental corrupt practices of politicians) (The News, 2010 p.18; Tell, 2005, 40; The Source, 2005, p.16). In a nutshell, there were more than enough excuses for the military to take over in Nigeria. Yet, the military has consistently remained subservient to political authority in Nigeria since 1999.

Why has African military become resilient in her conventional soldering duty rather than perpetuate the praetorian syndrome for which it was particularly notorious in the 1960 and 1970s? This study examines how and why the Nigerian military was de-radicalized and made subservient to civil political authority and the resultant upsurge in activities of non-state militant groups with serious implication for internal security of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Military and Politics: Brief Historical Excursion

The Nigerian military was a colonial creation. Nigeria Military had an origin traceable to June 1, 1863 when Lt. John Glover of Royal Navy (a British military officer) established a sixty man indigenous population force to enable him travel 'overland' following a ship wreck he suffered on River Niger in Jebba. Eventually, the recruits became known as 'Glover Boys'. It was the Glover Boys that formed the nucleus of what later became known as Nigeria Army. It was created to serve the colonial state in Nigeria. The Nigerian military successfully served the colonial master (Britain) not only in Nigeria by being involved in various wars especially in Northern Nigeria to subjugate the Sokoto Caliphate (Omoigui, 2018) but also in major theatres of war especially in Asia (Burma) during the 1st and the 2nd world wars (Okodaso, 1992, p.35).

In the democratization process, the soldiers that fought in the 2nd world war made significant contributions to nationalist activities that eventually led to Nigerian independence on Oct, 1st 1960. In other words, the first major involvement of the Nigerian military in the political process, though



not at corporate level but at individual level was in the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria (Post, 1981, p.326). It must be noted that these soldiers were discharged from military service before their involvement in the anti colonial struggle.

Shortly after independence, the Nigerian political parties were involved in insidious struggle for control of power at the national level (Anifowose, 2006, p.31). This struggle, given the ethno-religious configuration of Nigeria which the British colonial authority adroitly used to facilitate colonial rule at minimal cost with maximum economic returns to Britain, assumed fratricidal dimension when electoral frauds, political assassination and prejudiced judiciary persecution became political tools (Maier, 2002, p.1).

With inspiration from Egypt and Sudan, the military struck on January 15, 1966 when Majors Nzeogwu, Anuforo, Okafor, Ifeajuana and Ademoyega led soldiers from Military Training school, Kaduna and Ikeja Battalion to overthrow the first post-independence civilian administration in Nigeria. Incidentally, four of the five majors that spearheaded the military putsch were of Ibo origin (Ademoyega, 1981, p. 45). All the key political and military leaders assassinated during the coup d'état were non-Ibos except for the Quatermaster-General of the Army (Ibo officer) who was reportedly killed in error. The major beneficiary of the coup d'état was an Ibo officer-Major Gen Aguiyi Ironsi (Madiebo, 1980, p.15).

By July 29, 1966 the Northern officers staged what has been appropriately tagged, a 'return match' (Elaigwu, 1986 p.63) coup d'état as Ibo officers and civilians were indiscriminately murdered by ramping soldiers who originated from Northern Nigeria. Col Yakubu Gowon became the military Head of the new military administration in spite of the fact that there were serving senior officers to him from Yorubaland (Southern Nigeria)-Brig. Babafemi Ogundipe and Col. Robert Adeyinka Adebayo (Afowowe, 1998, p.37). This development eventually led to indiscipline in the military. Ethnic consideration became a major factor for military actions and policy thrusts. The political situation degenerated into a civil war that Nigeria fought from 1967-1970.

After several policy somersaults, Gen Yakubu Gowon was overthrown in a palace coup on July 29, 1975. The head of the new military regime, Gen Muritala Muhammed was assassinated in a failed coup attempt on February 13, 1976. The new Head of state, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo successfully transferred power to elected civil administration on October 1, 1979 headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari. The civil rule lasted for only four years, three months, when the military struck again on December 31, 1983. Gen. Muhammed Buhari took over. By 1985, August 26 precisely, disagreement among military ruling elite made the then Chief of Army staff, Gen Ibrahim Babangida to take over. In 1987, Nigeria military government alleged that Gen. Mamman Vatsa and some dissident officers were planning a coup d'état and all the alleged conspirators were summarily executed. In 1990, Majors Gideon Orkar and Saliba Umukoro made attempt to over throw Gen. Babangida in a coup that highlighted the desire of the minorities groups (Middle belt and Niger Delta of Nigeria) to revolt against perceived hegemonic domination of Nigeria political space by Hausa Fulani race (Alli, 2001, p.213).

By August 27, 1993, Gen. Babangida regime had lost credibility principally because of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election result by the regime in spite of the election being adjudged the fairest and best election ever in Nigeria electoral history. Gen. Babangida was forced by the military to handover to an interim regime under the leadership of Chief Ernest Shonekan. The interim regime lasted for only eighty two days as Gen Sanni Abacha took over the government of Nigeria on November 13, 1993.

On June 8, 1998, Gen. Sanni Abacha died in office under a curious circumstance. The then Chief of Defence staff, Gen Abubakar Abdulsalam took over as the second in command. Gen. Oladipo Diya, who was Chief of General Staff and the second in command was then in detention for purportedly plotting a coup d'état. Gen. Abubakar Abdulsalam handed over power to elected civilian administration, headed by a former military head of state, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. Since 1999, Nigeria military has essentially remained in the peripheral of Nigeria politics by performing the constitutional duties allotted to it.

Theoretical Issues on African Military Praetorian Syndrome

Contemporary literature on African military involvement in politics tended to provide analytical categorization of reasons and factors for military intervention. For instance, Naison Ngoma (2004) conceptualized military coup d'états' in Africa within the context of: (a) organizational model. i.e the military institution is seen as a modernizing agent that possess values and ideals that most post colonial African states political institution lacked. To this school, these values and ideal are necessary for attainment of development objectives of African states hence, the military intervenes in politics to inculcate these modernizing values and ideals into the political institutions of African states. Evidence abounds that African military 'mythical' values and ideals only exist in the imagination of protagonists of this theory. Every vice exhibited by civil political elite is also prevalent among military political elite.

Another categorization that Ngoma identified is the Praetorian Model. Under this praetorian model theory, Ngoma (2004) posited that internal-military cohesion in a fragmented political space of African states tended to facilitate a civil-military relations *“to the point that society ‘pushed’ the military into taking the reins of power even if it does not consider itself particularly effective in this role”*. Using Larry Diamond postulations, Ngoma, Further explained military coup d'états in terms of 'democratic government and stability equation'.

Suffice it to say, the above theoretical postulation does not offer fundamental explanation that is radically different from the classical theoretical formulations on military involvement in the African political process. The 'Politicization of Social Forces theory' by Samuel Huntington which tended to explain military coup d'états in terms of limited sole differentiation and over politicization of social forces engendered by post colonial political culture of newly independent African states. The 'Military Characteristics' theory in its different variants by Amos Perlmutter, Morris Janowitz, Lucian Pye, et al which explained military intervention in the political process of African states as being the natural outcome of the internal characteristics of the military such as 'corporateness', heroic posture, discipline and military cohesion. The Claude Welch's 'Contagious theory' (Welch Jr, 1970, p.26) which tended to explain the rapidity of regime changes in African states especially in the 1960s as an outcome of spiral effect of political actions of the military in neighbouring African states.

Ali Mazuri, 'Political incongruency' theory which explains military coup d'état in Africa as a necessary outcome of dysfunctional political system introduced and imposed on African states without due consideration for traditional ethos, values and cultural environments of African states. To Mazuri the political system of African state were incongruent to traditional African political culture, hence, the political system failure of which military coup d'état was a manifestation of the systemic failure. Claude Ake (1988) explained the phenomenon of military intervention in African politics through the 'Privatization of Public Realm' theory. This theory succinctly provided explanation for military coup d'états in Africa. Let me quote Ake.

...the effect of the privatization of the public realm where everything including government and its coercive institution has been privatized, everyone is on his own: everyone's security depends entirely on the power he can accumulate. That makes the struggle for political power extremely intensive.

The intensity of this struggle is all the more so because the capture of political power is also the means to wealth. In fact, the control of state power in Nigeria is the means to everything because the state is so powerful. Those who capture state power can have everything including other people's property and liberties. Those who fall in the power struggle are in grave danger of losing everything, including their personal safety.

Because power is so important, Nigerians seek it passionately. Everything which affects the prospects of power in Nigeria, be it census or elections, is contested bitterly, lawlessly and violently. Without exception, our election have been marked by the corrupt use of state power, total disregard for law including the engagement of private armies of murderous thugs. Politics has been militarized in Nigeria. It is effectively warfare. (Ake, 1988, p.120)

One significant thing about all these theories is that the theories explained how military intervened in the political process. It is the position of this study that military, with specific reference to Nigeria has not been proactively involved in the political process as it was in the 1960s. This study therefore explore explanatory paradigm for understanding the phenomenal decrease in military intervention in Nigeria political process.

De-radicalization of Nigeria Military: Conceptual Explanatory Note

Radicalism within the contextual framework of this study is construed as organized initiatives, activities and /or efforts that articulates and aggregates ideals, principles and /or interest(s) of particular individuals and/ or groups with specified intentions and abilities (real or imagined) to institute social, economic, cultural, political or even religious reform agenda that were not consistent with prevailing conventional practices. Most often, radicalism proponents deliberately set out to capture state power (government) in order to facilitate the implementation or more appropriately the imposition of professed agenda of the reformist regime on all and sundry. It is important to note that radicalism is not synonymous with progressive agenda. Indeed, radicalism may have a conservative agenda. For example, Gen. Pinochet reformist agenda in post Allende regime in Chile in the 1970s remained conservative despite its radical posture (Marshall, 1995).

Conventionally, the military institution is conservative. The military institution is established to dispense violence for purpose of state establishment, attainment of state objectives and sustenance of the prevailing societal order. Historically, Nigeria military performed this role creditably for the



British colonial authority (Omoigui, 2018). However, the attainment of political independence by Nigeria had profound effects on the Nigerian military. One of such effect is the politicization of the Nigerian military institution. This politicization created two classes of officers in the Nigerian military. There was an officers' class who had become integral part of the ruling elite. These officers were reportedly very active in assisting the NPC led Federal Government in suppression of revolts of masses against oppression and electoral frauds in Tivland (Middle-Belt) and Western Nigeria in the early 1960s because of pecuniary considerations. This group of officers was mainly the top echelon of the Nigeria military (Alli, 2001,p.211).

In contrast, there were also officers from the middle level officers' rank who considered the then prevailing order repulsive and disdainfully. These officers were committed to a set of political reform agenda which they want to forcefully implement. It was this latter class of officers that introduced radicalism into the Nigerian military (Okodaso, 1992, p.100). The pertinent question now is why did radicalism become dominant features of the Nigerian military of 1960s-1970s? The answer to this question is multidimensional. First, there is the historical context in which the Nigerian military officers' class emerged which created a condition that facilitated radicalism. The first Nigerian to be commissioned into officers' rank in the Nigerian military, Lt. Fred Ugboma was commissioned in 1948. Even after this commission, the Nigerianization of the officers' class was very slow. The officers' class was dominated by the British. This situation created a fertile ground for agitation by anti colonial nationalist. In other words, the Nigerian military was unwittingly integrated into anti-colonial struggle. This trend of course signified initial efforts that radicalized the officers' class.

Another plausibly reason for radicalization of the Nigerian military was the injection and/or admission of university graduates with sound liberal education tradition into the officers' class of the Nigerian military. It should be noted that the first coup-d'état in Nigeria was planned and carried out by the first set of university graduates to be commissioned into the officers' rank of Nigerian military. Indeed, Majors Emmanuel Ifejuana and Adewale Ademoyega admitted that they (graduates) deliberately enlisted in the Nigerian military to effect political changes through military coup d'état (Ademoyega, 1981, p. 23). There were also insinuations that Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, an Oxford University , London History graduate, in spite strong objections by his multi-millionaire father and robust opportunities for prosperous career in the private sector of the Nigerian economy, opted to join the Nigerian military to achieve his self defined political objectives (Maier, 2002, p.283). Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu later spearheaded political struggle that led to the fratricidal civil war in Nigerian between 1967 and 1970.

Third reasons for the intrusion of radicalism into the Nigerian military was the insidious direct involvement of the Nigerian military in the political process engendered by myopic and parochial agenda of leading politicians to suppress and exterminate opposition. Nigerian military was directly involved in special operations against popular revolts in Tivland and Western Nigeria just before military intervention in Nigeria politics. Indeed, most of the officers who engineered the 1st coup d'état in Nigeria on January 15, 1966 were involved, against their personal wishes, in the suppression of opposition (Ademoyega, 1981,p.12). It was alleged that Alhaji Ahmmadu Bello was already consulting with very senior officers led by Brig. Zakari Maimalari for final examination of opposition on January 17, 1966 (Alli,2002, p.212). In other words, the political class inadvertently induced radicalism in the Nigerian military.

One reason that cannot be ignored on how radicalism got into the Nigerian military was the inspirational roles that rebelling officers in other countries' military played in demonstrating the

efficacy of the military institution as available avenue for capturing of state power. Indeed, Fidel Castro and Chairman Mao Tse Tung were military heroes to some of the officers that carried out the first military putsch in Nigeria (Ademoyega, 1981, p.25).

In a nutshell, radicalism became the prevailing order in the Nigeria military in the period under review as a result of combination of the factors discussed above. The Nigeria military became restive as long as radicalism lasted. It was the process of de-radicalization of the Nigeria military that instituted a regime of professionalized military that has been subordinate to civil-political authority in the last twenty years in spite of existence of political climate that could have facilitated military putsch.

De-radicalization of Nigeria Military Process

De-radicalization of Nigeria refers to all initiatives, actions, efforts instituted by law and convention by political authority to induce a process by which the Nigeria Military officers became less sensitive and insulated from direct political involvement. It also included all deliberate actions by governmental authority to induce attitudinal change to ensure that coup d'état conception and execution became unattractive as a result of well demonstrated fatal consequences for coup plotters as well as increasing awareness among officers that coup-d'état chance of success is very remote.

The de-radicalization of the Nigeria military is an ongoing process. It is a process consistently being re-defined, fine-tuned and sometimes reformed. It was not an action instituted and completed by a particular regime. Rather, it is a process nurtured by specific historical, political and material environment of Nigeria. Different regimes introduced different measures that cumulatively resulted into and/ or advance the cause of the de-radicalization of the Nigeria military. Broadly conceptualized, the de-radicalization will be discussed under three broad categories.

Structural/ Institutional De-radicalization

At independence, Nigeria military was essentially dominated by the Nigeria army. Even up to now (2019), Nigeria military drew over eighty percent (80%) of her personnel (officers and men) from the Nigerian army. It is therefore the Nigerian army that dictated pace of military involvement in politics in Nigeria. With exception of Gen. Maman Vatsa purported coup d'état in 1987 where some air force officers were indicted for coup plotting, all other coup d'état (successful or abortive) have been masterminded by army officers. For this obvious reason, the discussion of the de-radicalization of Nigeria military will be discussed with particular reference to the Nigeria army.

The Nigeria army as at the time of the 1st military coup d'état consisted about ten thousand military personnel. The entire army was organized as a division. It was therefore headed by a General Officer Commanding (GOC.) First post independence GOC was Major Gen C.E Welby Everald and from 1962, Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi (Madeibo, 1980;8-14). The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970) led to rapid expansion of Nigeria army. As at 1970, Nigerian army had mobilized about 150,000 men and women. These mobilized soldiers were organized into three divisions. 1st Merchandized Division was headquartered in Kaduna. 2nd Division was headquartered in Ibadan and 3rd Marine Commando was headquartered in Port Harcourt. Later the 82nd Division was created with headquarters at Enugu, 3rd Armoured Division with headquarters in Jos and the Lagos Garrison Command with headquarters in Lagos was upgrade to a Division. Additional Divisions have also



been created to meet military exigencies and internal security challenges particularly in North-East and Niger Delta areas of Nigeria.

What is significant to our present discourse was that the Nigeria army which was just a Division as at the time of 1st military coup d'état in 1966 is now organized in autonomous eight operational divisions. Each of this division is completely independent of other in terms of personnel and armoury. The central co-ordination of the army is done through a central army headquarters situated in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital. The army headquarters is commanded by the Chief of Army Staff. Although officers and men of Nigerian army could be transferred from one division to another, inter division interaction between soldiers have been greatly curtailed. Indeed, officers and men movement are greatly monitored. It is also instructive to note that technically, each of the division is organized to be able to fight alone such that if the need arises, a division can take on any dissent division(s). The essence of this operational guideline for the Nigerian army is to make it practically impossible for officers and men of the Nigerian army to co-ordinate efforts that can supplant political authority (military or civil) through coup d'état. This is one of the reasons why no military coup d'état planned and executed by middle level officers without active connivance of the army headquarters' top echelons has succeeded in Nigeria since 1966. This is because requisite permission for officers to travel outside their regular base on consistent basis (which will facilitate communication among officers of other divisions) is like the proverbial horse passing through the eye of the needle, very difficult to obtain. These middle level officers have had to haphazardly organize themselves for coup d'états, without necessary inputs from all the divisions. This was the major bane of the Orkars coup d'états of 1990. Indeed, Lt. Gen Oladipo Diya (Former Chief of Defence staff and later Chief of General staff) who was the GOC of 82nd Division, Enugu as at the time of the Orkar's coup told me in a private discussion that he was already mobilizing his Division for possible assault on the coupists in Lagos before the coup d'état was foiled.

The important point here is that structural and institutional reforms of the Nigeria military made it extremely difficult for middle level officer's with-radical ideas and ideals to effect governmental change in Nigeria. This is perhaps why every successful coup d'état in Nigeria has been organized and executed with active connivance and in fact direction of top echelon of the Nigeria army headquarters. This also explains in a way, why it has not been possible for a low level officers like a Sergeant Nyadema of Togo, or Sergeant Doe of Liberia, or even a Flight Lieutenant Rawlings of Ghana, or a Col. Muhammer Ghaddafi of Libya type of military leadership to emerge in Nigeria. With the exception of Col. Yakubu Gowon (who was product of circumstances) (Oluleye, 1985,p.19) every military political leader in Nigeria has attained a minimum rank of one star General as at the time of becoming military Head of State. Aguiyi Ironsi was a two star General, (Major General) when he assumed office as head of state, on January 15, 1966. Muritala Muhammed was a one star general when he became Head of State on July 29, 1975. Muhammed Buhari was a two star General when he became military Head of State on December 31, 1983. Ibrahim Babangida was also a two star General when he became President on August 26, 1985. Sanni Abacha was a four star General when he became head of state on November 13, 1993 Abubakar Abdulsalam was a three star General when he assumed office on June 8, 1998 as Head of State.

Social Cleavages and De-radicalization

Another explanatory concept that provides useful insight into the de-radicalization process in the Nigeria military is the social cleavages factor within Nigeria military. This social cleavage made the

Nigeria military to share identifiable values and orientation with prevailing social order peculiar to the ruling (military and civil) elite in Nigeria. The social cleavage was achieved not necessarily as a deliberate government policy thrust outcome, but rather, as a necessary concomitant of societal unconscious socialization process through which social differentiation process between the ruled and the rulers is engendered.

Acceptance and practice of certain core values and principles are central to political enculturation process for every aspiring ruling elite. The Nigeria military has indeed undergone this process in Nigeria. This is one reason why it is increasingly impossible to make categorical differentiation between the military and civil rule policy orientation(s) and thrust(s). It also partially explains why the retired military officers have been playing dominant roles in the new democratic civil rule dispensation in Nigeria.

To be specific, the de-radicalization of the military in Nigeria was achieved through the two significant methods. First, the social orientation of new recruits into Nigeria military has changed significantly. One immediate consequence of military intervention in Nigeria politics was that the potential of the military institution as a veritable source of political power was amply demonstrated. This development had far reaching consequences for the type, caliber and motivation of the new recruits into the Nigeria military. Before 1966, it was very difficult for the Nigeria military to attract precocious Nigerians into her ranks particularly among the Yoruba's of the Western Nigeria. Most Nigerians considered the soldiery as second rated profession. But with the advent of military regimes in Nigeria, many Nigerians began to see the military as a career worth embracing. The political elite which hitherto refused to allow their children to enlist in the military began to ensure their children are enlisted in the officers' corps of the Nigerian military.

The implication of this point for our discourse is that the social background of the recruits into the Nigeria military has changed substantially. Whereas preponderance majority of people who enlisted into the Nigeria military before and during the Nigeria civil war were from relatively poor family social background, in the post civil war era, the majority of new recruits into the officers' class were people from relatively well to do families. In any case the military institution cultivated a recruitment policy that favoured the enlistment of children of elite to officers' class. One of the conditions for enlistment into Nigeria Defence Academy (basic training institution for enlistment into officers' class of the military in Nigeria) was a strong letter of recommendation from a serving or retired officers whose rank should not be below a Colonel. Again, recruitment into the officers' class as a result of intense competition became based on federal character principle. This principle prescribed pro rata recruitment ratio for officers on the basis of geo-political divisions in Nigeria. By convention, fifty percent (50%) of all recruitments into the military must be people from Northern Nigeria while the Eastern and Western Nigeria were to provide 25% of recruit respectively (Madiebo, 1980, p.10).

This convention which started in the post independence, Nigeria when Nigeria consisted of only three regions of northern, western and eastern regions have been sustained even under the thirty-six states structure of Nigeria. During the colonial period, recruitment into officers' class was purely on merit. Indeed, the first seven Nigerians commissioned into the officers' class of the Nigerian army were all from southern part of Nigeria. These officers were: Fred Ugbomah, Duke Wellington Bassey, Aguiyi Ironsi, Samuel Ademulegun, Ralph Sodeinde, Babafemi Ogundipe, and Robert Adeyinka Adebayo while Zakari Maimalari and O-mar Lawal were the first two commissioned officers into Nigerian military (Afowowe, 1998, p. 16).

The significant change in recruitment pattern affected the social orientation of the Nigeria military and assisted in de-radicalization of the army. Whereas the initial recruits immediately before and after the Nigeria independence were people whose social background made them to understand and appreciate the penurious living conditions of their family. It was quite easy for these set of officers to associate the general poverty with inept and corrupt civil political class. This social condition plausibly made them to be well disposed to revolutionary change of power base (radicalism). The 'new recruits' social background relatively made them to be immune from generalized poverty of the masses. Rather than being disposed to socio-economic system change, they are by social background predisposed to prevailing social system preservation and sustenance. This fact helped in further ensuring de-radicalization of the Nigerian military.

Social integration of the Nigeria military is another factor that aided the de-radicalization process. The income and welfare package of the Nigerian military over time, have been significantly improved. Appreciable percentage of Nigeria national budget is committed to the military expenditure. The military budget is more than education and health budgets in Nigeria. The improved welfare package for the military had adverse effect on Nigeria government to meet the challenges of other sectors of the economy. The disadvantaged sectors and groups have had to protest the insensitivity of Nigeria Government to their socio-economic plight. This protest was epitomized in Nigeria Niger Delta militant campaigns against Nigeria government and various private crude-oil exploration corporations (Shell, Mobil, Agip, Chevron, etc) (Nigerian Newsworld, 2010, p.20).

The direct implication of this agitation is that governments in Nigeria have had to rely increasingly on the military for suppression of internal insurrections. Invariably, the military and political elite interest became mutually dependent on each other. Government relied on military for sustenance of the state in face of militant agitations while the Nigeria military depends on government for sustenance of her social and economic privileges. A privilege many Nigerians were not opportune to enjoy. Inevitably, the military became socially integrated with the political elite and subsequently the process of de-radicalization became further consolidated.

Ethnic Configuration of the Nigeria Military

The influence of ethno-religious affiliations on recruitment, policy orientation and operations of Nigeria military has been fairly documented⁵⁶. Ethnic politics is an integral part of the Nigeria military institution. Promotions, career prospects and even discipline in the Nigeria military had ethno-religious colouration.

Ethno-religious factor played significant roles in radicalization and paradoxically in de-radicalization of the Nigeria military. The radicalized southern Nigeria officers who spearheaded the January 15, 1966 military putsch inadvertently radicalized the seemingly docile Northern Nigerian officers. When the January 15, 1966 coup d'état occurred, it was initially hailed by all sections of Nigeria including the military. However, as dust of the coup d'état settled and it became apparent that the killings of military and political elite were sectional, and the Ibo led government that took over initiated laws and policy decisions that were decidedly favourable to eastern Nigeria officers and people, the Northern became restive and resolutely took vengeance on Eastern Nigeria people, especially on officers from Eastern Nigeria (Madiebo, 1980; 61-96).

Since July 29, 1966 coup d'état, through various manipulative strategies, the Northern Nigeria maintained a strong hold on Nigeria military. All Chief of Army staffs appointed from July 29, 1966



to May 1999 when the new civilian administration headed by a southern- Gen Olusegun Obasanjo was elected into the presidency of Nigeria were all from the Northern Nigeria. The only exception was during the 2nd Republic civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari when a Yoruba officer-Gen. Alani Akinrinade was appointed Chief of Army Staff. Even then, the tenure of Gen Akinrinade was very brief as he was promoted to the office of Chief of Defence Staff. In Nigeria office of Chief of Defence Staff is legally regarded the highest military office but the Chief of Defence staff lacked direct asses to control of troops. In practice in Nigeria, the most powerful military office in Nigeria is Chief of Army Staff because the Chief of Army Staff has direct control of troops through the GOCs.

What is equally important to note was that Gen. Alani Akinrinade was appointed by a Northerner, President of Nigeria Alhaji Shehu Shagari as Chief of Army Staff, the President curiously created the office of Deputy Chief of Army Staff and a Northern Nigeria officer-Gen. Wushishi was appointed as the Deputy Chief of Army Staff. As soon as Gen. Alani Akinrinade was appointed Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Wushishi was promoted to the office of Chief of Army Staff and the office Deputy Chief of Army Staff was cancelled. The point-Northern Nigeria power elite never entrusted the power and control of the military to southern Nigeria officers after the July, 29, 1966 military putsch.

When Gen Olusegun Obasanjo became an elected President of Nigeria on May 29, 1999, he effectively manipulated appointment of military officers to strengthen the stability of his regime and therefore further the course of de-radicalization of the Nigeria military. Throughout Obasanjo regime's tenure (1999-2007), he appointed Chief of Army Staff from otherwise marginalized ethnic minorities. Generals Victor Malu and Azzazi were appointed from marginalized ethnic minorities of Northern Nigeria, Middle Belt Christians while Gen. Ogbomudia was appointed from the ethnic minorities of the rebellious Niger Delta Nigeria.

This adroit political manipulation created a situation where the Chief of Army Staff from 1999 to 2007 cannot effectively canvas or champion the interest(s) of any of the three ethnic majority groups in Nigeria. This was a critical factor in sustenance of Obasanjo regime for eight years in spite of numerous political upheavals that could have hitherto truncated through military coup d'état.

The election of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar-Adua to Presidency in May 2007 also led to continuation of the use of military appointments to stabilize the regimes in power. Alhaji Umaru Yar-Adua, appointed a fellow Fulani officer Gen Dambanzu to the office of Chief of Army Staff. In spite health challenges of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar-Adua that practically paralyzed the effective operation of office of presidency in Nigeria between November 2009 to May 2010 when Alhaji Yar-Adua eventually died (a conducive atmosphere for coup d'état) the military under Gen. Dambanzu remained loyal to the regime.

It is equally worth mentioning that President of Nigeria, Dr Jonathan Goodluck continued with manipulative politics of appointment of Chief of Army Staff. Dr Goodluck who is from Niger Delta minority group has appointed an Ibo officer to be the Chief of Army Staff. This is the first time that an Ibo officer will be appointed Chief of Army Staff since Nigeria 1962, when Major Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi was appointed as the GOC (head) of Nigeria army. In the latter days of his regime, President Jonathan appointed his Chief of Army Staff, General Maina from his home state of Balyesa state.

The essence of our discourse so far is to illustrate the point that ethnic configuration of the Nigeria military is paradoxically assisting the Nigeria state in the de-radicalization process of the Nigeria military. Appointed officers are instructively aware that their appointments are largely

informed by their ethno-religious background and their continue stay in office is guaranteed to the extent that power elite that appointed them continue to be in office. Most often, these appointed officers lacked independent economic and social support base with which they can catapult themselves to the presidency of Nigeria even through military coup d'etat. Coup d'etat planning and execution in Nigeria is a financially expensive venture. Hence, the appointed officers remained committed to sustenance of their political mentors in power.

CONCLUSION

By and large, the epoch of infantile radicalism in the Nigeria military seems to have elapsed. The military class in Nigeria by social disposition, structural arrangement and dynamics of ethno-religious politics has become de-radicalized to a level that it will be reasonable to conclude that the Nigeria military cannot be politically proactive at it was in the 1960s, a970s and 1980s.

On the basis of the de-radicalization process of the Nigeria military it is safe to posit that:

- (a) Military coup d'etat is not likely to occur in Nigeria as long as the ruling elite maintain the manipulation of the top echelon military appointment through ethnic politics.
- (b) Radical reform(s) of the type initiated by Col. Muhammar Ghadafi of Libya seem very unlikely in the context of contemporary Nigeria military experience.
- (c) Ironically, the de-radicalization of the Nigeria military created a situation where reform/revolution seeking elite no longer looked up to the Nigeria military as it was the 1960s rather, the revolutionary elite seem to have found vent for their frustrations with the Nigeria state in non-state military organizations. There seem to a correlation between the periods when Nigeria military became de-radicalized and when there was upsurge in formation of ethnic based non-state military group such as MEND (Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta), MASSOB (Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra), OPC (Odua People's Congress).



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