

**THE POLITICS OF MILITARY WITHDRAWAL IN GOVERNANCE: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

**Chijioko Basil Onuoha**

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State – Nigeria

**EBONG, ITORO BASSEY**

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

**OSEZUA OZINEGBE**

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

**Uno, Etim Uno**

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

**ABSTRACT**

Literature on politics of military intervention and transition programmes in Nigeria have attracted several attentions by different writers. The traditional role of the military is to ensure territorial protection against internal and external aggression not governance. Most African countries have experienced long military involvement in nation's politics. This has threatened their democracy due to the dictatorial and autocratic nature of military leadership styles. In Nigeria, immediately after independence in 1960, the country has witnessed series of military coup and counter coup. Several military regimes came up with the transition programmes on how to transit power to the civilian elected government. However, the reverse has been the case as the process was politicized to ensure their continued stay in office. This action triggered several coup which threatened the country's already weakened democratic system. The objective of this paper is to appraise several military intervention and the politics of military transition programmes in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of this study, the paper adopted historical and descriptive research method and data were drawn with the aid of secondary and primary sources. Army Personal and corporate interest theory was adopted as a theoretical framework. The major findings of the study revealed among others; that the problem of underdevelopment and political instability in Nigeria today results from long term military involvement in the nation's politics (ii) that the Nigeria Military organization has been bedeviled by the politics of prebendalism and ethnicity which in turned influence their constitutional roles and responsibilities. Available evidence portrays that the politicization of the military transition programmes in Nigeria has paved way for subsequent counter military coup. Based on the above findings, the paper recommended that (i) Civilian political class should disengaged from corrupt practices and extolling the ethos of good governance in order to avoid subsequent military coup as this is always been the case while military struck (ii) all elected and appointed officials in whatever capacity should provide good leadership. This is because the most potent weapon against military intervention in politics is good governance.

**Key Words:** Military intervention, Military withdrawal and Democratic Transition.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of a military regime's decision to enter politics is based on the characteristics of its involvement, either directly or indirectly (Huntington, 1956). Generally, the military is an institution established for the national security of a state. The traditional role of the military in any democratic society is to secure her country against internal insurrection and external aggression not to involve in politics. Accordingly, the military is not expected to play any role in the politics and government of any state. But despite this basic truth, the military have played remarkable role in African political history (Harb, 2003).

Military interventions are usually symptomatic of unstable or crisis prone political and socio economic systems. All military governments are oligarchies, and authoritarian and they make no pretention of being democratic even though they often claim they intervene to save democracy. It has now become a common acceptance that military regimes are regarded as an aberration, no matter the pretense or guise they appear in (Achike,1980).

The origin of military involvement in nation's politics dates back to an age long practice where by foreign territories captured by the military through wars (conquest) were administered and managed by the military. In these arrangements, civilians ran the government while the major decisions were taken by the military. The management would continue until such a time the soldier were satisfies that the conquered territory was firmly under their control. As such times, the civilians would replace the soldiers and set up political administrative structures, while the soldiers will continue to advance for the purpose of capturing more territories. In other words, the military has the constitutional right and responsibility of defending the state against external aggression and internal insurrections (Huntington, 1957).

Military intervention in politics is a common problem facing developing and under developed countries. In most democracies, especially in the developed world, the military concentrates in the performance of their constitutional roles. But in the third World countries, especially in Africa and Latin America where the democratic foundation is weak, the military constantly intervene in politics thus further weakening the already weak democratic foundation (Danopoulos, 1984).

Africa attained independence with great enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm was soon short lived when Togo set a dangerous precedence in West Africa, which later spread like wild fire to other African countries. By September 14, 1960 (starting with the Republic of Zaire) to July, 1975, there were no less than thirty three military coups in independent Africa. Thus many African Countries in quick succession were overthrown by force of arms sooner after independence by soldier. Nigeria took its turn of the bitter pill in the early hours of January 15, 1966 (Oyediran,1979).

In Nigeria immediately after independence, the nation witnessed series of military interventions and transition programmes from 1966 to 1999. However, most military regimes manipulated their transition programmes to achieve their selfish desires. Transition to civil rule programmes in Nigeria were strategies adopted by various military regime to prolong their stay in office rather than been a platform for relinquishing power to democratically elected government.

The paper aim at examining several military transition programmes and the politics of relinquishing power to the democratic elected government by the military in Africa using Nigeria as a reference point.

### **Statements of the problem**

Military rule is the involvement of the armed forces (the military) as a direct and active participant in policy making and governance in a state. It entails the unconstitutional takeover of the machinery of administration of a state by members of the Armed Forces based on martial laws- Decree and Edicts.

Democratic transition and succession in Nigeria like most developing countries has been descriptively problematic. Transition to democracy in Nigeria may be viewed partly as a historic inevitable response to transition from non- democratic military regimes in most cases. Nigeria has pursued elaborate transitions to democracy which in effect amounted to the gradual political disengagement of the military from politics. Since her independence in October 1st 1960, one of the political problems faced by the country has been the issue of succession from one democratically elected regime to another which were intermittently disrupted by some military and social forces in 1966, 1983 and 1993. Prominent among these forces are military intrusion and coup d' etat which has continually contributed to the breaks in the linkages between the civilian governments. This has interrupted the democratic adventure of the country and paved ways for lop sided federal and democratic practices with most military regimes being undemocratic and autocratic.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Military intervention**

Military regime is the type of government formed by seizing state power by force. Is a situation where the leadership of the state is directed under the leadership of any member of the armed management of Federal, State and to some extent Local Council Affairs. To a large extent, military involvement in politics can be seen as unconstitutional takeover of state machinery through a despotic means by the Armed Forces of that country.

Military intervention is the deliberate act of a nation or group of nations to introduce its military forces into the course of an existing controversy. It has to do with an act by which the men of the Armed Forces take over power from democratic elected government on grounds ranging from political instability, regional dichotomy, civilian incapacity to rule, corruption among others. It has to do with the involvement of the Armed Forces (Military) in governance and policy making in a state.

## **3. CAUSES OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS**

The reasons why the military has left their constitutionally assigned duties to meddle into politics cannot be easily summarized. Efforts at generalization of the reasons for military intervention are difficult. This is because, apart from this framework approach to deduce the reasons, experience

in Nigeria and Africa at large tends to suggest that there are other causes. As a result of these divergent view, it will be pertinent to examine some of these reasons.

**i. Breakdown of law and order:**

Military intervention in Nigeria's politics was necessitated by the total breakdown of laws and orders in the society. For instance in 1965 following the acting group intra-party crisis, law and order were broke down in the Western region. During the regime of AlhajiShehuShagari, there were rampant cases of breakdown of law and order everywhere in the country and there were violence here and there. These prompted for military intervention in an effort to salvage the ugly situation in the country.

**ii. Political crisis**

Another reason for military intervention in Nigeria's politics is the existent of political crisis. Notably among such crisis are the 1963 census crisis, 1964 Western Region crisis as well as 1965 federal Election crisis which claimed many lives and properties. The inability of the civilian government to curb these crisis paved way for the military to be invited with the primary aimed of putting the situation under control. Interestingly, after curbing the crisis, the military refused to return to barrack and rather capitalized on the platform and stageJanuary 15 1966 coup masterminded by Major Kaduna Nzueogwu.

**iii. Bribery and Corruption of government official and politicians**

Corruption always weakens the government and results in high chances of military coups. Corruption is defined as arrested development. Its plays a vital role in Nigeria's first and second coup d'etat. First republic politicians were accused of been corrupt by diverting public funds for their personal aggrandizement. They engaged in frivolous life stylesand had investments within and outside Nigeria looted from state treasury without considering the fate of the masses.They awarded state contracts based on personal, ethnic, religious and other partisan affiliations. This is often marked by "kick-back", that is returning certain percentage of contract fees as bribe to the contract awarding officers.

Most of their children were trained abroad with state fund.Owing to these, a lot of state funds got missing without proper accountability. This called the attention of the military. A men of the Armed Forces who see themselves as custodians of the constitution in January 15 1966 to struck with the primary aim of wiping out those corrupt politician and installing sanity in the system. In addition, insensitivity to public opinion on the part of the government andirresponsiveness to the yearning of the masses culminated in the military's efforts to dethrone them.

Expressively, Nigeria is still one of the most corrupt countries in the world, therefore, it will not be a surprise if the weak, corrupt politicians surrender the country to military rule. Without strong political leadership, Nigeria may fall into another military coup. Therefore, maintaining a stable economy and political atmosphere is pertinent.

**iv. The Centrality of the Military**

This reason provides the idea that the greater the resources and power the military has, the greater the chances of a military coup. A weak civilian institution may provoke strong military forces to take over power in the country, this is why the actions of military forces should be monitored

#### **v. Conflicts based on issues in the society**

No society is benefit of conflicts. These conflicts may include religious and ethnic problems; as witnessed in Nigeria and extremist during the first rise of Biafra. Nonetheless, it can express itself in form of terrorist, insurgent, attacker. As a multicultural and variant religious country the extremist religious groups like book haram have become real threat to the government of Nigeria. Others likes ISIS is the most obvious example of how religious fanatics can destroy a country. It is therefore necessary to protect Nigeria from this kind of threat.

#### **vi. Ethnicity, Nepotism and tribalism in the political processes**

The Politicization of the military along ethnic leaning also contributed to their tussle for political power. It is widely accepted that major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu toppled the TafawaBelewa regime and replaced him with his tribesman “Major General J.T.U AguiyiIronsi” who was subsequently toppled and replaced by General Gowon.

Regional differences are always provided as the reason for military intervention in the political affairs of Latin America. Nigeria also has same problems existing between its several states. In relative terms, Nigeria is a country where more than 400 tribes coexist peacefully. Arguably, the political climate could change. Certain Nigerian tribes may carry out actions that will cause political instability in the country and increase the likelihood of military coups. This will however not happen if the Federal government can provide new methods of cultural exchange between the representatives of the tribes.

### **4. MILITARY WITHDRAWAL**

The study of military withdrawal from politics remains a very fertile field for scholarly research. There are many similar terms which can be used to refer to “Military withdrawal from politics”. By military withdrawal from politics, we mean disengagement and return of the Armed Forces to barracks. It involves the termination of military rule and replacing it with civilian elected government. According to Campbell (1978), military withdrawal from politics means the return of the intervening army to the military barracks.

For Finers (1962:28) military withdrawal from politics is the situation where the military bows to the supremacy of civilian authority. That means the military recognizes both in principle and in practice, that the nation’s policies are the responsibility of civilian leadership. In the same vein Welch (1987:13) sees military withdrawal as when the military acts within well-defined and accepted channels where the ultimate power is in the hands of the elected government.

### **5. TYPES OF MILITARY DISENGAGEMENT FROM POLITICS**

Bayo-Adekson (1979) identifies three basic types of military disengagement. These are

**i. The counter coup-inspired Approach**

This occurs when the incumbent military leaders showed no interest of relinquishing power to the civilian, or when there exists sharp disagreement among the ruling junta over relinquishing power, or over dates of final disengagement of the military. Under this situation, the only possible alternative to remove military dictatorship is a counter coup, often backed with popular revolt to effect transitional change to civil rule. Gowon, Idi-Amin and Mobutu military regimes in Nigeria, Uganda and former Zaire respectively are cases in point.

**ii. The Military Turned Political Pattern**

This is a case of an incumbent military, the Head of State transforming himself through various manipulations, to civilian president. Puts differently, it is a case of “a surface change from men in uniform (Khaki) to soldier in-mufti (Agbada)”. Here the erstwhile military leaders having manipulated the polity to his favor, attracted support for his continuous stay in office and uses all the state apparatus to ensure their victory. In Africa, there are many cases of erstwhile military leaders contesting and winning presidential election. Jerry Rawlings and Samuel Doe were good examples of Ghana and Liberia respectively.

Cases of military turned to Civilian pattern are also common in most francophone Africa. This includes: Lamizana’s Upper Volta, Eyadema’s Togo, Bakassa’s Central Africa Empire, and Mobutu’s Zaire”. At the tail end of the Abacha’s regime, there were speculation and indication that he would transform to civilian president, but the pattern it would take was not known till his death in office

**iii. The Constitutional Evolutionary Model:**

The Military under this pattern fully disengages from political scene and relinquishes power to democratically elected civilians. Usually, a programme of action or transitional time-table to civil rule is announced and religiously implemented in phases or stages. Such programme may feature “processes as the making of a new constitution, summoning of a constituent assembly to debate and ratify the draft constitution, lifting of ban on political party activities and finally the holding of national election to determine the civilian successors to the military”. Both the Mohammed/Obasanjo (1976-79) and the Abubakar (1998-99) transition programmes to civil rule in Nigeria are clear examples of the constitutional evolutionary model. In both cases, the military had a transition time-table which was religiously adhered to until the final hand-over date as stated in the time-table (Awofeso, 2017).

**6. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

Essentially, democratic transition can be viewed as a way of transferring power from the military to the civilian. At the profound level, democratic transition involves socio-political transformation that allows freely elected political ruler and majority of the civil population to impose their choices and wills over the ruling oligarchies of the military or civilian ethno-

regional cabals. This is more or less intends for the development of internal democratic values, and principles which must ensure effective citizenship participation.

Ibrahim(2017) conceived democratic transition as a passage from non-democratic to ademocratic situation. It refers to the transformation process from a non-democratic regime to procedural democracy. The essential attributes of democratic transition is the establishment of constitutional rule and operation of multiparty system. Eichengreen,(2018) sees it as an instrument for bringing about social, political and economic improvements.

ForStephen (2018), democratic transition is all about operational and institutionalization of democratic principles, values, structures and processes leading to a fully sustainable democratic form of governance. Kumar (2015), examines the transition to civil rule in Nigeria and noted that the current transition from military to civilian rule is increasingly viewed as “a patched” one, just like in the second republic (1979-1983). It is arguably not a process to yield social, political and economic improvements due to the variables that have continually bedevil our current democracy. Nigerians are currently living in the period of torment, anxiety and uncertainties.

## **7. MILITARY TRANSITION PROGRAMMES TO DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA FROM 1966-1999**

In Nigeria and other African countries, it is a common practice for most military regimes to hurriedly announce a programme of action that will lead to final disengagement of the military from governance. However, experiences have shown that there is total lack of commitment in most of these transition programmes. Of all the military transition programmes in Nigeria, only two – the Mohammed /Obasanjo’s own and that of Abubakar were successful, while General Babangida’s civil rule ended up in a fiasco. The Ironsi’s transition programme to civil rule never saw the light of the day, while Gen. Gowon’s efforts were self-aborted. Abacha’s transition programme was inconclusive. We can briefly examine each of these transition programmes to civil rule and spot out their challenges (Awofeso, 2017).

## **8. IRONSI’S ATTEMPTED TRANSITION PROGRAMME TO DEMOCRACY**

In an efforts to return the country to democratic elected government, Ironsi after the coup promised to hand over to civilian elected government. Ironsi actually attempted as earlier promised to put in place a programme of action that would return the country to a civil system. However, his attempt never saw the light of the day.

Shortly after assumption of office, Ironsi set up two Commissions, the Constitutional Review Commission and Administrative Review Commission. The commissions were headed by Chief Rotimi Williams and Mr. F. Nwokedi respectively. On the political scene, the constitutional review commission was primarily charged with the responsibility of identifying “the constitutional problem in the context of one Nigeria”, the recommendation of which would be submitted to a Constituent Assembly, and followed by a referendum. At its inauguration by Ironsi, the commission’s terms of reference were stated thus:

1. To consider the merits and demerits of:

- a. A unitary form of government
  - b. A federal form of government
2. To identify those faults in the former constitution of Nigeria which militated against national unity and the emergence of a strong central government.
  3. To consider the merits and demerits of:
    - a. One party system
    - b. Multi-party system as a system best suited for Nigeria.
  4. To suggest possible territorial division of the country.
  5. To examine the voting system, Electoral Act and provision of voter's register.
  6. To determine to what extent party politics fostered tribal consciousness, nepotism and abuse of office.
  7. To determine to what extent professional politics contributed to the deficiencies of the past regime.
  8. To determine the extent to which regionalism and party politics tended to violate traditional chieftaincies and institutions and to suggest possible safeguards.

The other commission headed by Nwokedi submitted its report before the Williams commission could even start serious deliberation. The Ironsi administration based on Nwokedi's report went ahead to announce on 24 May, 1963 the following far-reaching political and administrative changes.

- i. The unification of administrative class of the various civil services;
- ii. The existing regions were to be abolished and replaced by groups of province;
- iii. Regional military governors were to be replaced by military governors of group of province; and
- iv. Military prefects would be appointed and would be in charge of various provinces.

Subsequent decisions and action of the administration following the above declaration, coupled with prevailing political circumstances led to the assassination of Ironsi in a military coup. For instance, Ironsi's transformation of Nigerian federal structure to unitary system through Decree No. 34 of 1966, his refusal or delay to bring to book the leaders of the January, 1966 coup many of which were Ibos and which had several Northern leaders as casualties, etc, may have prompted a counter coup in July, 1966. It is difficult to classify categorically the Ironsi attempted efforts under any of the three types of military disengagement. Because the administration's duration was too short to be subjected to any objective assessment.



## 9. GOWON'S ABORTED TRANSITION PROGRAMME TO CIVIL RULE

The counter coup of 29 July 1966 led to the installation of lieutenant Colonel Gowon as supreme commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces. Gowon was chosen as a compromise candidate. He was a Northerner, a Christian, from a minority tribe and had a good reputation within the army. After the Nigerian civil war in 1970, Gowon shortly announced a 9-point transition programme, which was supposed to terminate in 1976. Surprisingly, Gowon on October 1, 1974 came up with flimsy excuses and announced to the bewildered Nigerian populace that the 1976 hand-over date was unrealistic. According to him: Four years ago when I gave 1976 as the target date for returning the country to normal constitutional government, both myself and the military hierarchy honestly believed that by that date, especially after a bloody civil war... there would have developed an atmosphere of sufficient stability... 1976 is unrealistic, it would indeed amount to a betrayal of trust to adhere rigidly to that target date. His 9 point transition programmes are as follows:

1. Eradication of corruption in Nigeria's national life.
2. Creation of more states.
3. Reorganization of the Armed Forces.
4. Implementation of the National Development Plan and repair of war damage.
5. Preparation of a new constitution.
6. Fashioning a new Revenue Allocation Formula.
7. Organization of genuine national political parties.
8. Conducting National Population Census.
9. Conducting elections into state and federal offices.

It is pertinent to note that out of the 9-point programme mentioned above, four were not executed. These are: creation of more states, preparation of a new constitution, formulation of new political parties and the conduct of elections into state and federal offices. On the issue of corruption, it is difficult to give the administration a pass mark, as senior military officers and high-ranking bureaucrats lived in affluence in the face of abject poverty showered on the masses, despite the oil boom. It was therefore not surprising that Gowon's government failed to renege power to civilian elected government in 1976 as promised. This in turned stimulated a coup that overthrew his government in July 29, 1975.

### **The Mohammed /Obasanjo Transition Programme to Democracy**

The inability of Gowon to transit power to democratic elected government in October 1st 1976 under the guise that the date was unrealistic paved way for his removal. This was unacceptable to most enlightened Nigerians. The failure of Gowon to hand over power as promised therefore led

to his removal by Brigadier (late General) Mutala Mohammed in a bloodless coup on July 29, 1975.

Having taken over power from Gowon, the Mohammed /Obasanjo administration had a well formulated time table of transition to civil rule. The time table was divided into phases, each of which was expected to initiate and execute programme of action that will lead to the final disengagement of the military from political scene. These programmes of action include:

**Phase 1:** Creation and establishment of new states (August 1975-April 1976), constitution drafting (October 1975-September 1976).

**Phase 2:** Local government reorganization, reforms and elections, summoning of a constituent Assembly to deliberate on draft constitution (September 1976-October 1978).

**Phase 3:** Electoral constituencies' delimitation, lifting of ban on political parties activities (October 1978).

**Phase 4:** Holding of elections to legislative and executive offices at the state level.

**Phase 5:** Holding of elections to legislative and executive offices at the federal level and handover of power by October 1st 1979.

A further breakdown of the actualization of the programme reveals the following:

I seven more states were created in April, 1976, bringing the total number of states to 19.

ii The local government reform was initiated and adopted in 1976.

ii The Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) headed by Chief Rotimi Williams submitted its reports in September 1976. The committee was inaugurated in October, 1975 to produce "an initial draft of a constitutional arrangement which could provide a strong basis for the continuing existence of a united Nigeria".

iv Elections were held into the newly established councils in December, 1976.

v. The inauguration of the Constituent Assembly (CA) took effect in October 1977 and was headed by Justice UdoUdoma. The body was charged with the amendment and final adoption of the new constitution. The body submitted its work to the government in August, 1978.

vi The federal military government in September, 1978, lifted ban on political activities.

vii The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) was inaugurated in 1978 and was charged with the responsibility of regulating, supervising and conducting elections.

vii In July 1979, Military Governors were replaced by military administrators who served as Caretakers during the period of transition.

Viii General Elections were held on every Saturday between July 7, 1979 and August 1, 1979. The elections were in this order: First was the senatorial election, followed by the House of the Representatives, next was the State House of Assembly, after was the State Gubernatorial elections, and finally, the Presidential election.

Ix The final handover of political power to a popularly elected government took effect on October 1, 1979.

It is instructive to note that the Muhammed/Obasanjo transition programme was religiously executed to letters with no major alteration in the transition time-table. The Muhammed /Obasanjo method of disengagement approximates the constitution-evolutionary model. The military having implemented all its programme in the transitional time-table to civil rule fully disengaged from political arena and withdrew back into the barracks.

## **10. GENERAL BABANGIDA TRANSITION PROGRAMME TO DEMOCRACY**

In 1984, the military struck and General Mohammed Buhari came into power in response to the twin ills of corruption and indiscipline among public officers of the second republic. This regime was brutal and harsh (Osoba, 1996). This led to the imprisonment of several top government functionaries at both federal and state levels without being charged or even tried for any offence. Some were tried secretly by special military tribunals and they were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, including life, for crimes ranging from unlawful possession of government properties (Diamond, 1987). However, Buhari's regime did not have a transition programmes like others. On 27 August 1985 a palace coup took place which toppled the Buhari Regime and brought in General Babangida regime.

Babangida having resumed office as a new head of state in 1985, he came up with the transition programme on how to relinquish power to civilian government. The Babangida transition programme started in 1986 and ended up in a fiasco on August 26, 1993. Unlike the Muhammed /Obasanjo, the Babangida transition programme had no clear-cut time-table. Though, a time-table was later released by the administration, the government in its implementation, swayed from one programme to another with seemingly lack of direction and emptiness derived from lack of articulate programme, and perhaps the insincerity of the administration to relinquish power.

The following programme of action was later released by the Babangida administration:

### **Schedule 1 - Programme for 1987**

3rd Quarter – 1987

Establishment of the Directorate of Social Mobilization,

Establishment of National Electoral Commission,

Establishment of a Constitutional Drafting Committee

4th Quarter – 1987

Elections into local governments on non-party basis

**Schedule 2 – Programme for 1988**

1st Quarter – 1988

Establishment of National Population Commission

Establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau

Establishment of Code of Conduct Tribunal

Establishment of Constituent Assembly

Inauguration of National Revenue Mobilization Commission

2nd Quarter – 1988

Termination of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)

3rd Quarter – 1988

Consolidation of gains of SAP

4th Quarter - 1988

Consolidation of gains of SAP

**Schedule 3 – Programme for 1989**

1st Quarter – 1989

Promulgation of a new constitution

Release of new fiscal arrangements

2nd Quarter – 1989

Lift of ban on party politics

3rd Quarter – 1989

Announcement of two reorganized and registered political parties

4th Quarter – 1989

Election into local government on political party basis

**Schedule 4 – Programme for 1990**

1st and 2nd Quarters – 1990

Election into State legislatures and state executives

3rd Quarter – 1990

Convening of State Legislatures

4th Quarter – 1990

Swearing in of State executives

**Schedule 5 – Programme for 1991**

1st Quarter – 1991

Census

2nd Quarter – 1991

Census

3rd Quarter – 1991

Census

4th Quarter – 1991

Local government elections

**Schedule 6 – Programme for 1992**

1st and 2nd Quarters – 1992

Elections into federal legislatures and convening of National Assembly

3rd Quarter – 1992

Presidential Election

Swearing-in of new president and final disengagement by the Armed Forces

It is worth mentioning here that unlike the Muhammed /Obasanjo transition programme, the Babangida administration started its programme of action to civil rule in 1986 before it formerly releases its transitional time-table in July, 1987. Although, the administration implemented all the programmes in its time-table, except of course the last, that is, the swearing in of a civilian president, its time-table programme was subjected to intermittent alterations which in effect culminated into changes in the date of final disengagement of the military.

We can revert to those sequence of decisions and actions taken in order to accomplish the Babangida transition programme.

**1.** The government inaugurated the Political Bureau headed by Samuel Cookey in 1986 to proffer an enduring political system for the Third Republic. The Bureau among other things recommended a two-party system and the presidential system.

**2.** In June 1986, the government announced a blanket 10 years ban of all leading politicians and former public offices holders in the first and second republics. The list was further increased in 1987 and 1989. With this development, the term “New Breed Politicians” emerged in Nigerian politics.

**3.** In 1987, (MAMSER), the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) and National Electoral Commission (NEC) were created. The CRC, a 46 member headed by justice BubaArdo was charged with the responsibility of carrying out a review of the 1979 constitution in light of the accepted recommendation of both the Political Bureau and the committee on Draft White Paper. The NEC headed by Professor Ema Awa (he was later removed and replaced by Professor Humphrey Nwosu), who was charged with the responsibility of conducting local government election and subsequent elections.

**4.** On December 12, 1987, Local Government elections were conducted on a non-party basis.

**5.** Number of states were increased from 19 to 21 in 1987.

**6.** The inauguration of National Population Commission (NPC), the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Code of Conduct Tribunal. The Constituent Assembly and the Revenue Allocation Commission, all took off in 1988. The Constituent Assembly headed by Anthony Aniagolu was inaugurated for the purpose of debating and ratifying the draft constitution.

**7.** On October 7, 1989, the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) rejected the 6 political parties recommended by the NEC, and in their replacement decreed two new political parties – The National Republic Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

**8.** On December 9, 1990, local government elections were held on party basis and the open ballot system.

**9.** On August 27, 1991, 9 new states were created, thus bringing the total number of states to 30.

**10.** Census was conducted in 1991. Also, elections into state executive and the state legislatures were held. Civilian governors were sworn-in in January, 1992.

**11.** In 1992, the first two primaries conducted to select presidential aspirants were rigged. The NEC had to intervene. The results of the elections were cancelled, while the 23 presidential aspirants both for the NRC and SDP were banned from contesting future elections. The NEC came up with several options among which option A4 was approved by the AFRC. The open ballot system was also modified.

12. On October 16, 1992, the military government dissolved the executive committee of the two parties at all levels replacing them with caretaker committees. AlhajaLateefOkunnu was appointed the National chairperson for the NRC while Air-Vice marshal IshayaShakari (Rtd) was appointed the national chairman for SDP caretaker committee.

13. On December 5 1992, the National assembly was inaugurated. Dr. IyorchaAyu became the Senate President while Barrister AgunwaKniekwa became the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

14. On December 16, 1992, a 27-man transitional council was named to carry on the day-to-day administration of the country during the transition period. Chief Ernest Shonekan became the chairman of the transitional council, thus he became the first civilian Head of government under a military administration.

15. Following the dissolution of the AFRC, the military president announced the creation of the National Defence and Security Council (NDSC) which replaced the AFRC. President Babangida himself became the chairman of the NDSC while both the Transitional Council and the National Assembly were subordinate to the NDSC. The NDSC was the supreme law-making body.

16. Between December 1992 and February 1993, more than 240 new aspirants had made known their interests to contest in the new primaries to be based on the option A4 formula and the modified open ballot system.

17. Between February 6 and March 26, 1993, parties congresses based on option A4 and open-secret ballot system, were held at various levels to select the presidential flag bearers for both the NRC and SDP, local government and state congresses were held on February 6, February 20 and March 6, 1993, respectively for the two parties. The national congresses were conducted on March 28, 1993 in Jos for the SDP and Port Harcourt for the NRC. Both Chief M. K. O Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa finally emerged the party flag bearers for SDP and NRC respectively.

18. Following the election of the flag bearers of the two political parties, campaign for electorate supports were embarked upon by the two parties. The presidential election was finally conducted on June 12, 1993.

19. On June 23, 1993, the Babangida administration annulled (cancelled) the results of the June 12, 1993 election and insisted that another election be conducted before August 27, the final date of military disengagement in politics. This of course led to a protracted political crisis in Nigeria.

20. Between June 23, and August 25, 1993, Nigerian political landscape was beclouded by severe political tension. The country was at a brink of a total collapse. There were threats of secession, disintegration and war. Subsequent events later revealed that the NRC and a faction of the SDP were sold the idea of an Interim National Government (ING) as the only viable solution to the political impasse. Meanwhile the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) led by Author Nzeribe was busy campaigning for the extension of the Babangida administration by more years.

21. On August 26, 1993, the Babangida administration imposed an illegitimate Interim National Government (ING) to complete its uncompleted transition programme. Meanwhile, General Babangida government ‘stepped aside’.

It is instructive to note here as earlier mentioned that except the last item on the Babangida transition time-table, every other items were fully implemented. This however raised the question of insincerity on the part of the administration to relinquish power to a civilian president. It also goes a long way to buttress the allegation of a “hidden agenda” nursed by the regime to perpetuate the military in office, as confirmed by the administration’s continuous alteration of the time-table and postponing for at least three times the hand-over-date – first from 1990 to 1992, next to January, 1993 and finally August, 1993.

In contrast to the Muhammed/Obasanjo transition programme, the administration only succeeded in handing over power to undemocratically elected group of people otherwise, tagged Interim National Government after about 7 years of political sojourn and socio-economic engineering. It is difficult to classify the Babangida transition programme exclusively under any of the three types of military disengagement because it exhibits certain elements of them all. The announcement of a transition time-table and subsequent implementation of almost all its items may have initially qualified it as a Constitutional-Evolutionary Model. However, subsequent actions of the regime later revealed its “hidden agenda” to perpetuate itself in office. The indiscriminate alteration of the transition time-table, skilful initiation and implementation of diarchism, and the unchecked activities of the Association for Better Nigeria and the annulment of presidential election, all seemed to unveil an ambitious leader scheming to succeed himself in a military-turned political pattern of disengagement. At another extreme, the regime was forced to relinquish power against its wish, though not through a counter coup, the singular characteristics of no intention to relinquish political power to civilian seemed to have approximated the counter coup-inspired approach of disengagement. In all, the regime type of disengagement seem to have weighed towards the Constitutional-Evolution model than the other two.

## **11. THE ABACHA TRANSITION PROGRAMME TO DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election by the Babangida regime, and the subsequent transfer of power to a Caretaker Government, the Interim National Government (ING), headed by Chief Earnest Shonekan brought General Abacha to political power on November 17, 1993. The Shonekan led Interim National Government (ING) could not fulfill its objective; neither could it maintain law and order. The government lack legitimacy and failed to cope with the volatile issue of increased price of petroleum, incessant strikes organized by the Labour Union, non-recognition of the Head of State by some State Governors who “refused to come to Abuja to meet the new Head of State”, etc. with all this indications of total breakdown of laws and order, General Abacha eventually struck by forcing Chief Shonekan to tender his resignation in a bloodless coup. He christened his new military government as “a child of necessity” brought about by the circumstances discussed above.



In his nationwide coup speech on November 17, 1993, General Abacha remarked that: This government is a child of necessity. With the strong determination to restore peace and stability to our country, and on this foundation and through a lasting and true democracy. Give us the chance to solve our problems in our own ways.

The following decisions announced in the coup speech actually established a change of government.

- The Interim National Government is hereby dissolved.
- The National and States' Assemblies are also dissolved.
- The States' Executive Councils are dissolved. The brigade Commanders are to take over from the Governors in their states until administrators are appointed. Where there are no Commanders, the Commissioners of Police in the states are to take over.
- All Local Governments stand dissolved. The Director of personnel are to take over the administration of the local governments until Administrators are appointed.
- All former Secretaries to Federal ministries are to hand over to their Director-General until Ministers are appointed.
- The two political parties are dissolved. All processions, political activities, associations of any kind in any part of the country are hereby banned. Any consultative committee by whatever name called is hereby proscribed.
- Decree 61 of 1993 is hereby proscribed.
- A provisional Ruling Council is hereby established. It will comprise the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria as Chairman, the Chief of General Staff as Vice-Chairman, the Honourable Minister of Defence, the Chief of Defence Staff, Service Chiefs, the Inspector-General of Police, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, the Internal Affairs Minister, the Foreign Affairs Minister and the National Security Adviser.

General Abacha did not announce his transition programme until October 1, 1995, about two years after he ascended political authority. However, the administration had in May, 1994 inaugurated a constitutional conference composed of elected 'representatives' to the people to discuss and make recommendation to the PRC on various issues of political relevance that would govern the emergence of the new political dispensation. One year later, the conference submitted his report as well as a draft constitution. The Abacha transition time-table reads thus:

### **The Time-Table**

#### **1995 Last Quarter-October-December**

1. Approval of Draft Constitution.
2. Lifting all restrictions on political activities.
3. Establishment of the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON).
4. Creation of:
  - a. Transition Implementation Committee
  - b. National Reconciliation Committee
  - c. Federal Character Commission
5. Appointment of Panel for creation of States; Local Government; Boundary Adjustment.

**1996 First Quarter – January-March**

Election and inauguration of Local Government Councils on Non-Party basis.

**1996 Second Quarter – April-June**

1. Creation of States and Local Governments.
2. Commence process of political party registration.

**1996 Third Quarter – July-September**

Election of Local Government Councils on Party Level.

**1997 First Quarter – January-March**

1. Inauguration of party elected Local Government Councils.
2. Consolidation of new Political Party Structures.
3. Tribunal sitting and conduct of any Local Government Bye Elections.

**1997 Second Quarter – April-June**

1. Party-State Primaries to select Candidates for State Assembly and Governorship Elections.
2. Screening and approval of candidates by the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria.

**1997 Third Quarter – July-September**

1. State Assembly Election

**1997 Fourth Quarter – October-December**

1. Election of State Governors.
2. Sitting of the State Election Tribunals and conduct of Bye Elections.

**1998 First Quarter – January-March**

1. Inauguration of State Assembly and State Governors.
2. Party primaries to select candidates for national assembly election.
3. National Assembly election campaigns.

**1998 Second Quarter – April-June**

National Assembly elections

1. Primaries to select candidates for Presidential elections.
2. Commencement of nationwide campaign for the Presidential election.

**1998 Third Quarter – July-September**

1. Presidential Elections.

**1st October, 1998**

Swearing-in of a new elected President and final disengagement.

Following the release of the regime's transition time-table in October, 1995, the Abacha government took far-reaching policy action to implement the items on the time-table. It should be noted that the time-table frame for implementation in most cases was not strictly adhered to. For instance, primaries were expected to have been conducted in the second quarter of 1998 to select candidates for the presidential election, this never took place till the death of Abacha. Also, the creation of state and local government came much later after the specified period in the time-table. All-the-same the following actions were taken by the Abacha regime towards executing its transition programme:

- On October 1, 1995, the government lifted ban on political activities. Following this action, several political associations seeking for registration as political parties in the new dispensation emerged. Horse trading among politicians and political associations was witnessed, there were merging, alliances and re-alignments which eventually produced about 15 political associations.
- Following the verification exercise of claims of the 15 political associations seeking registration, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON) on September 30, 1996 published the performances of all the political associations. Only 5 – the United Nigerian Congress Party (UNCP), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the Congress of National

Consensus (CNC), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN), and the Grassroots Democratic Movement (GDM) were accredited and thus registered.

- On October 1, 1996, a total of 183 Local Governments and 6 more States were created, thus bringing the number of Local Governments and States to 774 and 36 respectively. The States created were Bayelsa State from Rivers State, Ebonyi State from Abia and Enugu State, Nassarawa State from Plateau State and Zamfara State from Sokoto State.

- Following the conduct of various primaries, elections were conducted into Local Councils, State and National Assemblies, as well as State Governorship.

- The commencement of primaries for the selection of the presidential candidates culminated into nomination of General Sani Abacha by all the five political parties on April 25, 1998.

- Meanwhile, various individuals, mostly agents, sycophants and apologists of the Abacha including the Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA) have taken over the process of the campaign for presidential election, calling for Abacha to transform himself into a civilian president or at best, contest the presidential election as the only candidate.

- General Abacha's death on June 8, 1998 automatically brought the entire process of the Abacha's transition programme to a halt.

## **12 .GENERAL ABUBAKAR TRANSITION PROGRAMME TO DEMOCRACY**

The sudden death of General Sani Abacha in office, the erstwhile military dictator and Head of State, on June 8, 1998 paved the way for General Abdulsalami Abubakar as the Nigerian new military Head of State on June 9, 1998. The choice of General Abubakar, Abacha's Chief of defense Staff, was based on several factors among which were his non-occupation of political office and strict adherence to military professionalism throughout his military career.

### **Towards Disengagement**

- Following the General Abubakar nationwide broadcast on July 20, 1998 which cancelled all the existing political structures and elections conducted during the Abacha regime, the same speech advised Nigerians to form new political association that will be registered by a new electoral body.

- A new electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) headed by Professor Ephraim Akpata was established to have responsibility for the "registration of political parties, registration of voters" and conduct of election at every stage.

- In the course of its assignment, INEC carried out delimitation of electoral wards during which 8, 810 electoral/wards were delimited.

- The INEC registered three political parties the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All People's Party (APP) from the 9 Political Associations that

scaled through the first process of Political Party Registration. The registration of the three parties was based on their electoral performance in December 5, Local Government election.

- A 23-member Constitution Debate Coordinating Committee (CDCC) headed by Justice Niki Tobi was set up to coordinate debate on the 1995 Draft Constitution.

- The rejection of the 1995 Draft Constitution and the promulgation of a new constitution (1999) based on the 1979 Constitution with little amendments.

- The INEC successfully conducted elections into various tiers of government – the local government on December 5, 1998, the Governorship and State Assembly elections on January 9, 1999, the National Assembly election on February 20, 1999 and the Presidential election on February 27, 1999.

- General AbdulsalamiAbubakar handed over power to a democratically elected President, General OlusegunObasanjo (Rtd.) on May 29, 1999 at the Eagle Square, Abuja.

### **13. THE POLITICS OF TRANSITION PROGRAMMES TO DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

One major aspect of military transition programmes to civil rule that is rarely analyzed in Nigerian politics is how successive military regimes have manipulated their transition programmes to achieve their selfish desires. Thus, transition to civil rule programmes as experiences had shown in Nigeria were political strategies often used by the military to legitimize itself, co-opt the political class and perpetuate itself in office.

Nevertheless one major strategy the Babangida regime used to legitimize its regime in the face of intense criticism against persistent military rule at the beginning of its administration was the promise to relinquish power through a transition programme to civil rule, the absence of which incidentally led to the criticism of his predecessor, General Buhari who was never in a hurry to announce any programme of transition to democracy. The same transition programme was manipulated by General Babangida to perpetuate himself in office by continually extending the final disengagement date, first from 1990 to 1992, and later to 1993. In the case of Abacha's regime, having legitimized itself with a promise to convene a Sovereign National Conference (a promise which was never fulfilled), the regime proceeded to consolidate itself by co-opting the political class into supporting a 'self-styled' transition programme to civil rule.

The same transition was manipulated in such a way that the military was to be perpetuated through transmutation of the Head of State to a civilian president but for the fact that the Head of State died in office before the end of the transition programme. Another political dimension which transition programmes to civil rule had long taken but rarely emphasized is the tendency to use transition programmes to negotiate a "safe exit" for the military either by handing over power to a compromised candidate who will not 'rock the boat', or to hand over power in crisis for another military leader to seize power and continue with the status-quo, or at the extreme, the military leader transforms himself to a civilian president.

The anticipated non-comfortability of the military with Chief M. K. O Abiola's presidency who allegedly knew the military inside-out was identified as one major reason that informed the military regime of Babangida to annul the June 12, 1993, Presidential election which Abiola won clean and clear. Consequently, the Babangida regime sought for a 'safe exit' elsewhere. This is found in the Interim National Government (ING). The same could be said of General Abubakar's transition programme to civil rule. Most political observers share the opinion that President Obasanjo was considered by the military elite a more compromised candidate that can guarantee the military a safe exit than Chief OluFalae who contested against Obasanjo during the 1999 presidential election. The reason for this is not far-fetched.

With his military background as a retired army General and a former Military Head of State it was believed that Obasanjo would adhere to the spirit of esprit de corps by covering up the misdeeds and misrule of past military regimes, and possibly proceed to relinquish power to another retired general. On the other hand, Chief OluFalae was considered a threat to the military because of the radical ideology of his political party, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) which the military feared may initiate a probe into its past atrocities. It was therefore not surprising that the majority of the retired Generals including the former Head of State, General Babangida, threw their weight, both morally and financially, behind the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the party under which General Obasanjo (Rtd) contested and won.

General Abacha however pushed the safe exit of the military to the extreme by attempting to transform himself to a civilian president. A new dimension to status-quo maintenance by the military was to hand over power in crisis, manifest or potential, which were created by the military itself. This enabled the military to stage a comeback on the flimsy excuse of civilian's inability to maintain law and order. Such was the situation created by Babangida's transition programme. Expectedly, the ING lasted only for 82 days as it could not contain the ensued crisis it was supposed to manage. This however, paved the way for General Abacha military regime.

#### **14. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To give this paper a scientific base, the researcher adopted Army Personal and corporate interest theory as a theoretical framework. The theory states that coups are executed due to personal ambition of Army officers. This ambition is sometimes personal to individual officer and at the times corporate to the whole army. For example, when some military officers have been publicly insulted or humiliated by politicians or even senior officers in power, they plan coup to restore their lost pride e.g. when president Ahimadegbe of Togo publicly humiliated his Chief of Army Staff, a coup was planned and executed the next day to unseat him from power.

Furthermore, the military may intervene when it is not in favor of the policies adopted by the regime in power. Domestically, if the ruling regime begins to take irrational move against a particular ethnic group which many Army Officer belong to, a coup may be executed to protect the interest of that group.

In the light of the above theory, the January coup 1966 (first Nigeria Coup) seemed more as a coup sponsored by the Igbos for their sectional interest. This is because after the coup, out of 22

Officers that were promoted, 17 were Igbos while the greatest vanquished during the coup were non- Igbos. Dimka'a coup can also be cited as one of those coups executed as a result of the fear of demobilization. Secondly, most military transition programme to civilian elected government were executed based on the personal and collective interest of the Armed Forces to perpetuate their stay in office. This happened during Gowon, Babangida and Abacha's regimes where the military were looking for ways to legitimize their tenure instead of relinquishing power as promised to the democratic elected government. This actions are in line with the assumption of the theory which states that military coup are executed due to personal ambition of Army officers with a group or sect of corporate interest at heart.

## 15. CONCLUSION

The paper, so far, unveils the programmes of action and actual implementation of transition to civil rule initiated by successive military regimes between 1966 and 1999. More importantly the politicization of these transition programmes were subjected such that there were varied attempts to transform erstwhile military Heads of State to civilian president during Generals Babangida and Abacha regimes; as well as calculated strategy for "safe exit" for erstwhile military rulers and to hand over power in chaos to enable the military stage a comeback as experienced during General Babangida transition to democracy.

## 16. RECOMMENDATIONS

**i.** In order to keep the military out of politics, the issue of transparency and accountability should be taken into consideration by the civilian elected government to avoid subsequent coup d'etat. The present civilian government especially its agencies such as public service has the duty to operate a transparent administration and be accountable to its citizens.

**ii.** The civilians should focus on good governance and strict penalty should be meted out to defaulter. Also issue of corruption need to be seriously tackle with all the various agency established such as ICPC, EFCC. The agencies should be well equipped and trained to carry out their functions diligently without interference. This will help to curb the chance for military intervention.

**iii.** The politician should learn to implement their electioneering promises after wielding the political offices. Also the issue of insecurity challenges facing the country should be quickly address as this alone can call for subsequent military to intervention.

**iv.** The politics of civilian or military interference in the elections or selection of military or civilian personnel's and leaders respectively should be looked into, since him who pay the piper dictating the tune. Also, the military should face their constitutional role of maintaining security externally and quelling internal insurrection rather becoming a partisan in decision making process of the state.

---

**REFERENCES**

Achike, O. (1980) *Groundwork of Military Law and Military Rule in Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Adekanye (Adekson) B. (1979) "Dilemma of Military Disengagement" in Oyediran, O. (ed) *Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule, 1966-1979*, London: Macmillan Publishers.

Awofeso, O. (2000) "Nigerian Youths and Democratic Stability in the New Millennium: A Socio-Psychological Analysis, *Journal of Education and Society*, University of Uyo. Vol. 3. No. 1 pp 86-98

Bennett, V. P. and Kirk-Greene, A. H. M. (1978) "Back to the Barracks: A Decade of Making Time" in Panter-Brick. Keith (ed) *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria*; London: Frank Cass and Comp. Ltd.

Campbell, Ian (1978) "Army Reorganization and Military Withdrawal" in Panter-Brick. Keith (ed) *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria*; London: Frank Cass and Comp. Ltd.

Danopoulos (1984) . *From Military to Civilian Rule in Contemporary Greece*. *Armed Forces and Society* 10(2): 56- 229

Deckson, B (1979) "Dilemma of Military Disengagement" in Oyediran, O. (ed) *Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule, 1966-1979*. Macmillan Publisher, London.

Diamond, L. (1987): *Class, Ethnicity, and Democracy in Nigeria*, Blackwell Publishers.

Dudley, Billy (1982) *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics.*, London: Macmillan Publishers.

Eichengreen, O. (2018): *Nigeria Political Transition and the Complexities of Gender Empowerment*. United Nation Report .

Finers, S. (1962). *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*. Praeger, New York.

Harb, I. (2003). *The Egyptian Military in Politics. Disengagement or Accomodation?.* *Middle East Journal* 57(2): 269-290

Huntington (1957). *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil Military Relations*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge

Ibrahim, J. (2017) *Democratic Transition an Anglophone West Africa*, CODESERIA, Monograph Series. Available at [www. Codesira.org/IMG/ PDF/ Ibrahim.pdf](http://www.codesira.org/IMG/PDF/Ibrahim.pdf). Accessed on 17/02/2020.



Kumar, A. (2015). Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation in Nigeria: Drawing Lessons from the Democratic Experience in India. Available at *India Journal of Asian and Africa Studies*, 40 (5), 371-392.

Osaba, O. (1995) 'Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspective' *Review of Africa Political Economy*. No. 69:371-386.

Oyediran, Oyeleye (1979) (ed) *Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule, 1966-1979*, London: Macmillan Publishers.

Stephen, A. (2018). Towards Consolidated Democracies. *Journal of Democracy* 7(2):14-33

Welch, C (1987). *No Farewell to Arms: Military Disengagement from Politics in African and Latin America*. Westview Press. Boulder.