



Military, politics and professionalism in Nigeria: The emergent issues

Salahu Mohammed Lawal^{1,2}, Iyasu, Yakubu Ahmed²

^{1,2} Department of History and International Studies, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria

Abstract

The History of modern Military in Nigeria began with the British incursion into this part of the world. From the humble beginning towards the end of 19th Century, the institution has grown to be most enduring one in the modern Nigeria. Her growth could be attributed to professionalism and constitutional role assigned to her; the role that has not only seen her defending the oneness of the nation during the civil war to her incursion into politics. The role that no doubt equally affects her professionalism. It is on this premises that the paper examined the emergent issues that has to do with military as a professional sector and institution in Nigeria.

Keywords: modern military, British incursion, professionalism, constitutional

Introduction

The Nigeria is a derivative word from 'Niger-Area from what Flora Shaw, a staff of *The Time* in an article used to refer to the newly acquired colonial, territory of the land around River Niger and its immediate environs. The usage 'Niger-Area' was later shortened to read Nigeria and applied to a wider area from the coast at area of Lagos, Benin, Port Harcourt (Bights of Benin and Biafra) to the extreme north of Sokoto Caliphate and Kanem Bornu ^[1]. In 1914, after completion of phases of Amalgamation, Nigeria officially came into being as a nation-state through The amalgamation of Nigeria Act ^[2].

Prior to the conquest, amalgamation and colonial administration, the entire land refers to Nigeria was dotted by states, kingdoms, empires and principalities that were independent of one another. These principalities and polities maintained their autonomy or lost such autonomy due to the strength or other wise of their military institutions. With the European imperial adventure in the course of nineteenth century, these polities and principalities fell to the British might through military conquest ^[3] or coercion.

The conquest that began with the bombardment of Lagos in 1851 ended with the fall of Sokoto Caliphate in 1903. In all these conquests, the military as an institution play significant role. The Nigeria military had its foundation laid in 1863 when Governor of Lagos, Lt. Glover for security reasons found it necessary to raise an 18man team of Northern Nigerian to protect the lives and properties of British residents (traders and missionaries) in and around Lagos and trade routes therein ^[4]. With time, the Nigeria members of British colonial forces continued to increased and formed the pillar of the imperial forces in the conquest of Nigeria people and its society. And, throughout the colonial administration, the military remains a strong institution in the politics of colonial Nigeria in maintaining peace and order. During this period, the military also received best of training under British tutelage.

In the post colonial era, the military continue to have the best of training in both local and international military institutions. This made them excel in both local and international engagement as we saw during the civil war of

1967 – 1970, U N Peace Keeping operations and in the West African (ECOMOG) operation in Liberia. To keep Nigeria one and ensure peace, orderliness and security of life's and properties, the military had course to venture into politics from 1966. Since then, they have governed the country for more than Twenty-nine years. During this period, the military produced a new class of managerial elites and ambitious officers that affected her constitutional role and professionalism.

It is in the light of this, that the paper attempt on examination of military, policies and professionalism as an institution in the Nigeria historical development. However before going further, it become necessary to give a working definitions of key words in order to appreciate our line of discussion.

The conceptual clarification

The Nigeria Military

The military also refers to as an armed force is professional organization established and normally authorized by a sovereign state to use lethal or deadly force and weapon to support the interests of the states ^[5]. This connotes that the military is an institution saddled with primary responsibility of security matters. Thus, the military in Nigeria is composed of the Army, Navy and Air force with a population of about (200,000) two hundred thousand men and women across rank and files as at 2015. It has primary responsibility of defending the nation's territory from external attack or repel would-be enemies. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria gives the function of the military in section 105 as

The protection of the country against all forms of internal and external danger/threat or attack is a primary responsibility of government performed through the armed forces in collaboration with the civilian population. Subversion of government policy from within or without, religious intolerance and fanaticism, ethnic antagonism and class struggles, unemployment, hunger, perceived inequality and social injustice, etc. are the major sources of international threats to security, while the grave forms of external threats are aggression or actual attack on our

territorial integrity, both of which represent an assault on our very survival as a people [6].

Politics

Politics is everybody's concern because it connotes the entire process of organizational governance that involved making and enforcement of decision for the wellbeing of the people and the society. Hence, politics is described as the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially, the debate between parties having power [7]. Politics also involve decision making of allocation of resources in the society. i.e. who get what and when. Thus, military being part of the larger society despite having their organizational characteristics constitute part of decision making and enforcement process.

Based on the above, and in line with liberal democracy [8], Janowitz [9] and Alfred Stephen [10] argument encourages more political participants by the military as it affect their interests, constitutional structure, standard and national security and development. This submission accounted for significant interest and incursion of military into the front line of politics in Nigeria and other African nations within a decade of post-colonial governance. A situation that remain so up to 1990s.

Professionalism

Professionalism is the competency or skill expected of an individual or group in a given profession. A profession is a calling in which one has acquired social knowledge and skills used by either, instructing, guiding or advising other or sourcing then in some art. It lay claim to conclusive technical competence and adhere of construct James Bork opined that a profession is a high statues occupation whose members apply abstract acquired knowledge to solve problem in a particular field of endeavor [12]. This invariably means that a professional person is an individual who have acquired competency through specialized training in a given field of endeavor. Considering our subject matter, the military, military profession is thus defined by Williams as

An occupation requiring education and special training to perform acts within certain rules and conventions within a group that has the same vocation. The vocational aspect is the readiness of the group to defend the national value and interests of the nation at the risk of its life [13].

From the above definition, Nigeria Armed Forces (Army, Air force and Navy) are professional body or segment of the society that acquired their expertise over a period of time derived from cumulative experience, training and education [14]. This placed them by their vocation to venture into partisan politics through coup to defend the national values and interest of the nation.

History of the Nigeria Armed Forces

The foundation of the Nigeria armed forces was laid in Lagos, two years after political annexation and its declaration as a British colony. This began in 1863 when the then Governor of Lagos, Lt Glover of the British Royal Navy established an 18 man team of northern Nigerians that came to be known as Glover's Hausa for security purpose. The troop was expected to protect the lives and properties of the British residents (traders, missionaries) and the trade

routes around Lagos [15].

In 1896, following the granting of British government Royal charter to National African Company, a British merchants company which gave her "all rights, interest, authorities and powers for the purpose of government, preservation of public order and the protection of the said territories [16] and extend the authority to contiguous areas [17], so the need to establish a military outfit. The military outfit Royal Niger Constabulary was established through an instrument 'the Royal Niger Company Regulation No XVI of 1886 [18]. The outfit rose from 150 members in 1886 to 996 in 1897 [19]. In 1897, Fredrick Lugard raised another military outfit known as the West African Frontier Force [20] and operated side by side with Royal Niger Constabulary. The West African Frontier forces were formed into Battalions.

The West African Frontier Force and the Northern Nigeria Regiment were amalgamated with Lord Lugard as its commander. Following the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria military regiments were integrated to form the Nigeria Regiments of West African Frontier Force [21]. As count down to Nigeria independence, the visit of Queen Elizabeth in 1956 other troops outside West African Frontier Force became Queen Owns Nigeria Regiment (QONR). In the same year, military autonomy was granted to colonies hence the remaining of QONR to military force (NMF). When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the name changed to Royal Nigerian Army and in 1963 when Nigeria became a Republic, it change to Nigeria Army and with other forces Air force, and Naval force it became Nigerian Armed Forces [22].

Since independence, Nigeria Armed Forces have been involved in coup and counter coups, civil war, quenching of communal conflict and activities of militia groups and insurgencies. Their involvement in those military exercise to defend the national values and interest that have led to its expansion both in personnel, training and military hardware. The Nigerian Armed Forces was established and built after British model and trained in British Fashion of military professionalism of subjecting military to civilian control [23]. this notion notwithstanding, Nigeria like other African nations and Arab would in less than a decades after independence saw the military incursion into politics. In Nigeria they remained at the helm of politics for about three decades.

Nigeria Military Incursion into politics

As stated earlier Nigeria Military is built and trained in British military tradition where soldiers are expected not to take active roles in the politics but remain a passive instrument in the hands of the government, an efficient agent to carry out the ends decreed by its political masters without sentiment or complaint [24]. Thus, the military main task or responsibility to achieve the above expectation included defense of the country, assisting the government in internal security duties, protection of the country's territory, undertake welfare or relief duties as may be assigned by the government and undertake international duties under UNO/OAU to maintain global peace [25]. This tradition and duty was broken in January, 1966 when they intervened into the political scene. The intervention though least expected by political elites, it was not too many going by the pre-colonial leadership who were more or less military aristocrats. As patriots and nationalist who swore to protect the nation from disintegration, the intervention was to

rescue the nation from what they perceived as enemies of nation and noted as “the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent....The tribalists, the nepotists.... those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian calendar back by their words and deed [25].

The first military intervention was on 15th January, 1966 led by what come to be known as the Five Majors. The coup leadership lost control hence the emergence of General Aguiyi Ironsi as Head of State. On July 29, 1966, a counter coup was staged that brought Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon as Head of State and commander in Chief of the Armed forces. Nine years later, General Gowon was overthrown on July 29, 1975 and Murtala Mohammed installed, who was assassinated in an aborted coup of 13th February, 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo who was the then chief of Staff became the new Head of state and successfully handed over power to Shehu Shagari, on 1st October, 1979 as the first executive President of Nigeria.

In the twin light of December 31st, 1983, after four years three month of civil rule the military struck again and General Mohammed Buhari was installed as Head of State. General Ibrahim Babangida came into power on August 27, 1985 through what was considered a palace coup. After series of political misendeavor by Babangida, he installed chief Ernest Shonkan as leader of an interim Government only to be brushed aside by General Sani Abachadi on 17th November, 1993. General Abacha on 8th June 1998 and was succeeded by Abdulsalam Abubakar who handed over power to civil rule after a rushed democratic transition that brought olusegun Obasanjo to power on 29 may, 1999.

Politics and professionalism of the military

The incursion of the military into frontline politics of Nigeria was in two phases. The first began on 15th January, 1966 with the overthrow of the first Republican Government and ended on 1st October 1979 with the handing over to civil rule of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. In between this period, the country was ruled by four military Head of State namely General Ironsi, General Gowon, General Murtala and General Obasanjo. Thesecond phase lasted from 1st January 1984 to May 29th, 1999. The period saw the emergence of four military Head of state; General Buhari, General Babangida, General Abacha and General Abdulsalam and a diarchy system of government that lasted 87days under Chief Ernest Shonekan - a civilian business man.

The reason for military intervention is not our concern here, however, it must be stated that societal dynamics and character of the military made it possible for such an action. The societal dynamics according to Welch were political forces of civilian regime not able to stop social upheavals and the military responsibility of maintenance of national internal security [27]. In their first intervention they often made it clear to be in government for a short period with the aim of being corrective regime. But, as soon as they got to government the situation may be of far from what they thought and subsequent corps that occurred made them remain in power more than necessary.

The incursion of the military into Nigeria political arena no doubt brought out the managerial capabilities of the military considered by most Nigerians not to have managerial instinct to rule the country [28]. This was because in the first two decades of Nigeria independence, most of its members

are not well educated due to the exigency of there recruitment; civil war, and national character. Overtimes, they have succeeded in arresting the country from drifting into oblivion by restoring and maintaining laws and order. Their impact could also be seen in the political development and structuring from four regional structured states to 36states structure, economic development through control of wasteful expenditure, increase in the internally generated revenue, and expansion of education sector among others [29].

Despite the above achievement of the military intervention in politics, it has affected their level of professionalism. This began with legitimacy question where the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria forbid unlawful control of the government of Nigeria or any part, expect in accordance with the provisions of the constitution [30]. Moreso, that the training they received those not prepare them for the governance of the nation. The use of violence in overthrowing legitimate government institutionalized the use of violence as means of changing government [31]. This account for coups and counter coups during the period of military regime and use of maximum force to curb violence in different parts of country.

The military is a national institution hence their subservant to any civil governance irrespective of who the leadership is. However, since the end of civil war and recruitment into the armed forces on quota basis made them to drift from putting an end to all anti-socialmellius and strengthen national unity to primordial sentiment along political and social consideration [32]. Added to this, is the fact that hierarchical and command structure became affected as respect and taken of directives by the among the military was tied to ones area of origin [33]. This development destroyed the cohesion in the military as a national institution.

Professionalism is much attained through training and cumulated experience, in which the division in the military came to affect the choice of officers for further training and promotion. This is against the tradition of ensuring the selection of high quality personnel shall be the high point of recruitment policy [34].

Similarly, the incursion perceived as being corrective most especially in fighting corruption the military long stay in government and coming to terms with some politicians affected them. The military officers in government became corrupt amassing wealth and properties personally or enriching their friends, relations and cohorts. This made many of the retired generals to be the richest in Nigeria since their incursion.

The emergent issues

Since mid-1980sdemocracy has become widely accepted globally. In Africa and other part of the world the wind of change saw the gradual withdrawal of the military from political arena except after retirement. In Nigeria, this process came to an end with transition program that led to institutionalization of democratic governance in 1999. The return to barrack and their constitutional role of working under civil rule call for us to examine why and how to promote this.

Firstly, the military participation in politics seen as means of acquiring wealth, has attracted well educated individuals into its fold. Which made it unattractive. Many of this young man trained and retrained at home and abroad were

subjected to military doctrine of their traditional role of national defense and development.

Secondly, the out fashion of military coup all over the world discourages military incursion into the politics. More so, Nigeria at one time or the other restored constitutional government in neighboring West Africa countries such as Sao Tome.

Thirdly, the confirmed professional Military Education as being advocated all over the globe. The PME has the capability to instill a well round military professionals who can only contribute or participates minimally in the politics of the nation.

Moreso, the withdrawal and non-participation in the politics will serve. The military corporates interest. This will further make them regain their battered image and respect in the eyes of the public ^[35].

Conclusion

In the paper, we have examine the military from nationalistic point of an enduring national institution. We also discuss the history of the military and then intervention into Nigerian political scene. We also observed that their incursion though came with tangible results, it no doubt affected their professional calling. This could be seen from their professional conduct in curbing crises and violence in parts of the country, corruption among the military, absence of cohesion and disrespect for hierarchical structure and lost of respect from the public. The paper condoles that, their withdrawal from 1999 is gradually restoring their pride and with training and retraining other professional competency shall be regained on improved upon.

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