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An Examination of Military Regimes and Development in Nigeria: Strength and Weaknesses, 1966-1979.

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ABSTRACT
This paper examined some Military Regimes in Nigeria. It discussed the military heads of state between the periods of 1966-1979. It analyses the strength and weaknesses of these leaders viz; MajorGeneral AguiyiIronsi, General Yakubu Gowon, General RamatMurtala Mohammed and General OlusegunObasanjo. Primary data for the study was obtained through oral interview of selected gerontocrats and others above the age of fifty years, political scientists, political analysts, and political historiansas primary source of information gathering (random sampling method was adopted in the selection of interviewees). Archival material was used to supplement and substantiate the sourced information. Secondary sources like books, newspapers, articles, journals, theses and dissertation and internet material were also used. It was found that the military rulers contributed much to the development of Nigeria in spite of their flaws. It concludes that military rule could be positive in contribution, particularly when commitment is enlisted from the leader. It is further posited by the authors that the management of governance goes beyond the type of government to enlist commitment and sacrifice from the leaders before able development could be achieved and sustained.

Keywords: Military, Governance, Anti-democracy, Force, Coup.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of military intervention in politics has become prevalent in most of the developing countries of the world. The result is that the military establishment which is traditionally expected to guard a nation against external aggression and internal subversion has becomes the locus of political power (Kolawole, 2001:1). Ademola posits that military coups in Africa started in 1963 when General GnasingbeEyadema of Togo ousted the late President Olympio from office and that this unprecedented military interregnum in the year 1963 marked the beginning of military governance which soon blossomed into a devastating political current sweeping across the African continent (Ademola, 1999).

Military rule in Nigeria started in 1966 after the abortive coup of January 15, 1966. Some Majors in the Nigerian army, led by Major Chukwuna Kaduna Nzeogwuorganized this coup. Following the failure of the coup, the most senior officer in the army, Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi became the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces. Thus the first military administration in Nigeria was established and the military dominated the political space (in Nigeria) covering the period between 1966 -1979 and 1983-1999 (Ediagbonya, 2007). The first military coup of January 15, 1966, instead of sanitizing the polity, succeeded only in polluting the nation's political terrain. It was an unfortunate landmark event that paved the way not only for military intervention in political administration, but also for incessant military coups and the attendant political instability.

Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi became the military head of state from the 16th January, 1966 to July 29, 1966. General Yakubu Gowon came to power on July 29, 1966 and was removed from office on July 29, 1975. The third was General MurtalaMuhammed who became the Head of State on July 29, 1975 and was there till Feb. 13, 1976. General OlusegunObasanjo became the Head of State on February 14, 1976 till 1979. Again General Buhari came to power in December 1983 and was there till 1985. General Ibrahim BadamosiBabangida came to power in 1985 and ruled the country till 1993. General Abacha was in power in 1994-1998 while General AbdusalamiAbubakar assumed office in 1998-1999 (Ibid). So it is not an exaggeration to say that the years between 1966-1999 in Nigeria was essentially that of military rule. The result is that the military has left vivid imprints on every aspect of the nation's political life. These military administrations sought to restore the political and economic stability that had been disrupted during the civilian administration in the country. They therefore purported to correct the ills of the society as well as streamline the economy (Ibid).

It is important at this point to examine the concept 'Development' which is a critical term in this paper. The understanding of this term 'development' will enable us to know whether the activities of military administrations in Nigeria can be seen as developmental. At the level of individuals, development can be seen as an increase in skill and

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capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being while at the level of social group, development refers to an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Rodney, 1972).

Steven Langdon and Lynn Mytelka explained that development can be thought of as a process of structural change and capital accumulation that moves a society closer to conditions in which the basic needs of the people (for shelter, food, clothing etc.) are met, full employment prevails and social economic equality is increasing (Steven and Mytelka, 1979:124). From the above, one can see that development is an all-embracing word which includes unity, stability, health services, educational opportunities, creativity, self-discipline, material well-being, increase in capacity and skills. It means change over time. To define military and state its functions is also apposite here. The military in Nigeria, as in other countries of the world, is seen as an institution whose basic function is to provide security for the nation. In fact, it has a responsibility to defend the territorial integrity of the nation.

According to Osiruemu, the military in Nigeria as in other countries of the world, is perceived as a professional institution, whose basic function is the maintenance of the socio-political order (Osiruemu, 1995:5-10). The concept of military rule is created from the circumstances of a fact in which a government emerged from military intervention in politics, a situation that arose from 1966 in Nigeria to correct the ills of the society. This corrective has however become repetitive and military governance has stage played on the administrations and political functions performed by the erstwhile civilian government (Ibid). In this new capacity of governance, various military administrations enacted decrees, acts, policies and guides which have affected the development of other institutions which perform specific functions in the political economy (Ibid).

Also, Section 197 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federation, States the functions of the military thus:

(a) Defending Nigeria from external aggression.
(b) Maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its borders from violation on land, Sea or Air.
(c) Suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so (Federal Republic of Nigeria, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 Section 197). On the strength of the above understanding, military rule and development in Nigeria can now be examined.

The issue of military rule in Nigeria has generated heated arguments among contemporary scholars. While some see military rule as an aberrations and retrogressive polity, others see it as a corrective intervention against large scale corruptions, embezzlement, fraud etc. among the political class. Akin(1979) observes that the military has contributed significantly to maintain a commendable level of political stability in the country, particularly since the end of the Civil war in 1970. The political order created by the military facilitated rapid economic growth during this period (Ibid; pp. 54-55). It was also said that the military administration in Nigeria experienced the fastest growth rate in Nigeria's economic history and the economy grew at a very high rate of 8 percent annually between 1966 and 1975 (Ibid). A critical and constructive analysis of the achievements of military heads of State between 1966 and1979 will add credence to the claim that military regimes contributed to the development of Nigeria between 1966 and 1979.

Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, January 15, 1966-July 29, 1966

Following the failure of January 15, 1966 coup, the most Senior Officer in the army, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi became the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Thus the first military administration in Nigeria was established. In his broadcast to the nation on January 28, 1966, Major-General Aguiyi, Ironsi outlined the policies and programmes of his government as stated below:

Fellow citizens, tonight I wish to outline the policies and programmes of my Government for the Republic. All Nigerians want an end to regionalism. Tribal loyalties and activities which promote tribal consciousness and sectional interests must give way to the urgent task of national reconstruction. The National Military Government will preserve Nigeria as a strong nation. We shall give firm, honest and disciplined leadership. There are a number of urgent problems now facing us. In solving them I shall count on your continued co-operation (Major-General AguiyiIronsi Broadcast, January 28, 1966).

In this new spirit of a united Nigeria, one of the first steps he took was to recognize the four regional federal structures. Instead of continuing with the regional system, Ironsi divided Nigeria up into groups of provinces. A military Governor was appointed to each of the groups of provinces in accordance with this new unitary system of government.

Decree No. 34 was promulgated to empower a unitary system of government for Nigeria. By this arrangement, as from May 24, 1966, Nigeria ceased to be a federation but a Republic of Nigeria. The federal Military Government was to be known as the National Military Government. The regions would be referred to as a group of provinces. At the centre, Ironsi established a council, known as the Supreme Military Council which consisted of the Supreme Commander, the Military Governors, the Heads of the three Nigerian Armed Forces and the Nigerian Police Force. Ironsi also appointed an executive council which was intended to supervise the day-to-day activities of the Government.

General Ironsi's regime was too short-lived and too pre-occupied with serious political problems to make much meaningful impact on foreign policy and external relations. However attempt was made to lay a solid foundation. Major-General AguiyiIronsi in 1966 summoned a regional conference of Heads of Nigerian Missions in Africa to Lagos so as to have a comprehensive review of the country's foreign policy. It was a manifestation of his disposition towards a virile African policy that he started with the Heads of Missions in Africa. Consequently, he justified this by stating that:

In the whole sphere of Nigeria's external relations, the government attaches the greatest importance to our Africa policy. We are aware that because of our population and potentials, the majority of opinion in the civilized world looks up to us to provide responsible leadership in Africa… We are

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convinced that whether in the political, economic or cultural sphere, our destiny lies in our role in the continent of Africa (Stremlau, 1977:3).

The conference identified 5 policy positions that would accord with Nigeria's national interest, these were:

(a) Political stability and internal security which would create a conducive environment for the progressive development of Nigeria's resources for the benefit of its citizenry;
(b) Guarding the nation from external subversion;
(c) Preservation of the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity;
(d) Promotion of co-operative ventures among nations of Africa in the economic, technical, cultural and other fields; and
(e) Support for the protection of the interests and dignity of Nigerians living in other African countries (Ibid, 12-13).

Again the ambassadorial conference recommended four objectives for Nigeria's African policy, namely; good neighborliness, co-operation among African states to reduce areas of crisis, dedication to the evolution of continental unity and opposition to foreign domination and racial discrimination (Ibid; 13-14).

In a way the objectives were in line with the ones articulated in 1960 by the Balewa regime in relation to the African sub-region. It is quite unfortunate that General Ironsi was assassinated in July 29, 1966. Hence he was unable to give practical meaning to his administration's foreign policy drive. His regime was toppled in a counter-coup de 'tat that brought in General Yakubu Gowon (Rtd). This was because the coup of January 15, 1966 was seen by some Northern elements to be an Ibo plot to eliminate them from the corridors of power and to establish Igbo political hegemony in Nigeria.

In this regard, it should be pointed out that the North believed and insisted that the coup had an ethnic regional undertone because some Southern politicians like Dr. Azikiwe, Dr. Okpara, Dr. Dennis, Osadebe, Chief Awolowo all escaped and survived. On the other hand, top Northern politicians like Sir TafawaBalewa, Sir Ahmadu Bello and some top military personnel like Brigadier ZakariMaimalari, Col. Kur Mohammed etc were killed.

In the opinion of Ediagbonya, to compound the strained political relationship among the units, the composition of the coup plotters call for questioning. He further noted that the coup was led and most probably initiated by seven army officers, six of whom were Ibos (Edigbonaya, 2007). Hence it becomes difficult to convince the North that the January 15th, 1966 coup was free from sectional and partisan orientation and ideological stance.

Weaknesses of General Aguiyi-Ironsi

The North saw General Aguiyi-Ironsi's refusal to try coup plotters as a betrayal since the coup failed. Ironsi's preference for a unity structure instead of a federation shows clearly that he had poor understanding of the political nature of the country, especially the purpose for the adoption of the federal system of government in Nigeria. It must be said that the promulgation of Decree No. 34 was done in bad fate. It was done to empower a unitary system of government for Nigeria. By this arrangement, as from May 24, 1966, Nigeria ceased to be a federation but a Republic of Nigeria. From the foregoing the counter coup of July 29, 1966 organized by the aggrieved Northern Soldiers in which Major-General AguiyiIronsi was assassinated was concluded as inevitable.

General Yakubu Gowon
Strength

The second military coup known by many as a counter-coup brought Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Yakubu Gowon to power. General Yakubu Gowon (Rtd) was a Lieutenant Colonel and Chief of Staff in Ironsi's government. D. M. Jemibowen states that Gowon assumed office in a period of socio-political degeneration, beclouded by an atmosphere of inauspicious circumstances, cynicism and uncertainty (Jambiowen, 1978:23). Gowon, in circumstantial wisdom,and knowing the situation on ground, quickly reverted the country back to the federal structure through Decree 9 of September 1966 (Decree 9, September, 1966).

Also in order to calm suspicion and hatred, mostly in the west, Gowon went on to release political prisoners from jail. Among those released were Chief ObafemiAwolowo, Chief LateefJakande, Chief Enahoro, Chief Bola Ige and others who were jailed in the infamous trail of 1962. By this gesture, he succeeded in calming suspicion and hatred mostly in the west. Also, he succeeded in restoring normalcy and confidence to the Nigerian populace.

In order to facilitate effective administration in the country, General Gowon put in place administrative structure. There was the Supreme Council and an Executive Council, whose composition and functions were the same as that of General Ironsi. At the state level, the military Governors were assisted by an Executive Council largely made up of civilian commissioners. His cabinet included such notables as Chief ObafemiAwolowo (Federal Commissioner for Finance and Vice-Chairman of the Federal Executive Council), Chief Anthony Enahoro (Information) Chief Joseph Tarka, Communication and later Transport, MallamAminu Kano (Health) and Dr. Arikpo (External Affairs) etc.

One characteristic of this regime was the introduction of civilians into the military administration of Nigeria.Yahaya posits that Gowon recognized the value of political skills in government and so the regime undertook to conciliate political groups in the country on his assumption of power (Yahaya, 1979:262). The association of civilian politicians with Gowon administration contributed enormously to the legitimacy of the Government (Ibid, 262). Fawole supported this position when he commented that Gowon was a more conciliatory person who preferred to carry his team along than impose his will (Fawole, 2003:54-55).

In the area of the creation of states, General Gowon made a commendable adjustment. On May 28, 1967 the Federal Government under General Gowon announced the creation of 12 States. Decree No. 14 of 1967 was promulgated to that effect. The creation of the new states was very much welcomed especially by the minority groups who had long been clamoring for such creation in order to relieve them from the constant fear of domination by the larger ethnic groups. The importance of state creation can be seen in the article of T. Muhammadu, when he said "at the root of the problem is the desire for development by

each locality (Muhammadu, 1986:3). Unless the people in the area control their own destiny, they do not stand a chance of realizing their development potentials (Ibid).

General Gowon created 12 States in 1967 in order to curb the imminent disintegration due to the threat of secession of the eastern part of the country. By the provisions of the States (Creation and Transitional Provisions Decree 1967), Nigeria was carved up into 12 States (Provisions of the States Decree, 1967). It may be necessary at this point to discuss the agitation for state creation in Nigeria. The 1957 conference which sat to discuss the question of Nigeria's independence took much time to discuss the issue of minorities (Ediagbonya, 2018: 367). The agitation for state creation was so explosive that the issue of re-division of the country into more states came into focus (Ezera, 1960:245).

As Nigeria approached self-government there were development of minor nationalism and particular demands for separate autonomy within each existing region (Ibid, 246). There was strong demand for the creation of middle belt state in the Northern Region. In the Western Region, there was also serious agitation for the creation of Mid-west state, while in the Eastern Region, there was the demand for the creation of Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers State. Ezera notes that Oba Akenzua II championed this separatist demand in 1950 when the Benin delegation under him boycotted the Ibadan General Conference because the Western Regional Conference did not recommend the establishment of a separate Benin/Delta State (Ibid, 1960:245). In all these agitations it was only Midwest Region that was created from the Western Region in 1963 because of numerous challenges associated with the creation of new Region or States. It was against this background that the creation of 12 States in 1967 by General Yakubu Gowon was highly commendable.

In the area of economy, it grew at a very high rate of 8 percent annually between 1966 and 1975 and the real national output increased. Akin(1979) emphasized that the rate of growth of real investment was incredible, 35 percent during the same period, nearly triple that for the civilian regime (Akin, 1979: 54-55). Again there was an impressive growth in the manufacturing sector as the administration of General Gowon introduced the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree, 1972, known as the indigenization Decree (Ibid).

The major reason for this Decree was to retain a substantial portion of the benefit of industrial development in Nigeria. The indigenization decree was also targeted at national economic independence and self-reliance and thus correcting the imbalance between the indigenous and foreign participation and instituting indigenous control over the Nigerian economy which is highly commendable. During this period, several small businesses became the exclusive domain of Nigerians and several other categories of business were to have 40% equity participation by Nigerians through the sale of shares (Ibid).

In order to prevent absolute dependence on oil which could be counter-productive, General Gowon launched food production programme in 1972 in order to boost food production in the country. Another area in which General Gowon deserves commendation was the way and manner he handled the Nigerian Civil War. In spite of Lt. Col. Ojukwu's provocation, he fought the war to keep Nigeria united. The Civil War which started in July 6, 1967 ended in January, 1970. General Gowon demonstrated strength of character, courage, patience, determination, patriotism, enthusiasm and nationalism(ibid).

EmeAkpofure maintains that the end of the Civil War was followed by Gowon's astute speech of "No Victor… No Vanquished and his refusal to punish war prisoners or dissidents and his efforts at reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction deserves commendation. (Akpofure, 1997). The destroyed bridges, burnt markets, cement factories, salt, oil location, roads, railway lines and health centres received fast attention in the eastern part of the country in particularly and Nigeria in general. Oni observes that General Gowon embarked on large scale rehabilitation programme after the Civil War (Oni, 1980: 110) there was no retaliation against the former Biafras who were quickly re-absorbed into Nigerian affairs (Ibid). The country came out of the Civil War more united and focused.

General Yakubu Gowon established the National Youth Service Corps in 1973 which was aimed at promoting the spirit of self-reliance among the Nigerian Youths. The NYSC scheme is the first major official programme ever-embarked upon by the Nigerian authorities to involve youth in the development of the country. The NYSC scheme was established by the Federal Government Decree No. 24 of 22nd May, 1973. It was officially inaugurated by the then Head of State, General Gowon on 4th June, 1973. The scheme in the real sense of it, succeeded in instilling some sense of self-discipline and self-sacrifice in Nigerian youths (Ediagbonya, 2007). According to Ediagbonya (ibid), it also succeeded in inculcating some seeds of national unity through its programme such as corps members serving in States other than their own and often in rural areas (Ibid; 20).

In the area of foreign policy, Fawole constructively assessed the system of foreign policy under General Yakubu Gowon noting that General Gowon was a more conciliatory person who preferred to carry his team along than impose his will (Fawole, 2003: 54-55). Ray Ofoegbu noted that Gowon's foreign policy was dictated by the Civil War. According to him, it was the Nigeria Civil War which completely removed the commonwealth from the dominating position it had occupied in Nigeria's foreign policy between 1954 and 1967 (Ofeogbu, 1979: 126-127). The country now became more active in the non-aligned movement.

The civil war years brought some realities to the conduct of Nigerian foreign policy. It was the contention of the Federal Government that the succession bid of the Eastern region would be viewed as a treasonable act by her western allies and that they would join in avoiding it. To the contrary, Britain was not even sure initially which side to support in the conflict (Kolawole, 2001: 53) and when it finally supported the federal side, it was done with cautions (Ibid). Fawole explains that Gowon's regime was a remarkable exceptions as it was made of men like, Chief ObafemiAwolowo, Chief Anthony Enahoro, MallamAminu Kano etc who were also veterans of Nigeria's independence struggles and that this group brought considerable influence to bear upon the direction of the country's external policies especially during the civil war (Fawole, 2003).

During this period, there was a new emphasis on Africa and a genuine cultivation of the friendship

of Russia and Eastern Europe. The principle that Africa would be central to Nigeria's foreign policy adopted by Prime Minister Alhaji Sir.AbubakarTafawaBalewa was consistently upheld by all succeeding regimes. The Gowon regime translated it into concrete action after the civil war by the establishment of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 (Ojo, 1980). The perception of the need for a collective body came out of the lessons learnt during the civil war that Nigeria could not afford to have hostile neighbours and that efforts should therefore be made to bring all West African states together for sub-regional cooperation (Fawole, 1999: 153).

As for Britain, the domestic opinion in that country was antagonistic towards the federal side. According to Ogunbadejo, worthless debates, the hostile mass media, the wavering attitude of some key cabinet ministers and the refusal to supply the Nigerian Air Force with aircraft and bombs, all helped to inflict serious damage to the goodwill that Britain enjoyed in Nigeria (Ogunbadejo, 1976: 15).

It was also established that USA was also not steadfast in its support for the federal side. Even President Nixon, was openly in support of Biafra. In this circumstance, the Federal Government was compelled to turn attention to Soviet Union for the supply of arms which the USSR gladly accepted. So during the war years, Nigeria-Soviet relations improved tremendously. In fact it became very cordial. The Soviet ambassador was allowed in 1967 to make a broadcast on the nation's radio to articulate the Soviet policy in Nigeria. (Aluko, 1981: 105). By 1969, the volume of trade between both countries had reached ₦28.6million (Ibid, 25). Consequently after the war, General Gowon conferred the Soviet ambassador, Romanov with one of the nation's highest honours, the Commander of the Order of the Niger (C.O.N) in order to register the nation's appreciation for his support during the war (Aluko, 1981:105). The above achievement of General Gowon indicated that his regime marked the beginning of a progressive era in the history of the country's foreign policy (ibid).

Weaknesses

However, General Gowon could not sustain this laudable achievements, because of greed and inordinate ambitions of members of his cabinet. He could not even remove or redeploy his military Governors in the face of allegation of corruption against them. Although Gowon set-out with a laudable mission anchored on the popular three-pronged idea of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation, his regime was soon engulfed by the fire of sit tight syndrome, the bane of the African leadership, obsessed and intoxicated by the power and the spoils of office, General Gowon reneged on his pledge to quit office in 1976, arguing that it was unrealistic. The wealth of the nation got into Gowon and his regime became riddled with corruption, nepotism, extravagance and intolerance to criticism. In the Daily Times Comment of August 6, 1975, the regime of Gowon was accused of lack of consultation, indecision, indiscipline and neglect (Daily Times, August 6, 1975).

The Gowon regime wasted the nation's fund by organizing the 3rd All African Games in Lagos which involved over 20 Black African States. It could be asserted that, the money spent could be diverted to economic sector to enhance our economic stability. Hence the regime was overthrown by yet another military coup which took place on 29th July, 1975 under the leadership of General Ramat Muhammed.

The Regime of Generals Ramat Mohammed and OlusegunObasanjo

The overthrow of General Yakubu Gowon on 29th July, 1975 brought into power, a more dynamic and radically inclined military ruler in the person of General Murtala Ramat Muhammed, who served the Gowon regime as Federal Commissioner after the war. In fact so much pride is often attached to this era by Nigerian scholars and commentators. The regime took over in a relatively calm atmosphere which enabled it to carry out its programmes without being constrained by internal problems or challenges to its legitimacy (Kolawole, 2001:111).

His vision about the country came out clearly in his broadcast: "The nation was being plagued in chaos. It was obvious that matters could not and should not be allowed to continue in this manner. To give the nation a new lease of life, it was decided to remove General Gowon. This government will not tolerate indiscipline. This government will not condone abuse of office. I appeal to you all to co-operate with the government in our endeavour to give this nation a new lease of life. This change in government has been accomplished without shedding any blood and we intend to keep it so (Otoghagua, 2004, 98-99).

General Ramat introduced three new organs of government:

(a) The Federal Supreme Military Council. This comprised senior military officers under the chairmanship of the Head of State.
(b) The National Council of States made-up of the military Governors
(c) The Federal Executive Council. This was made-up of Federal Commissioners

At the state level was an executive council made up of Commissioners. This was necessary to facilitate effective administration both at the federal and state level. The new head of states, General Ramat announced a 5 stage programmes of transition to civil rule. The first step was setting up of a constitutional drafting committee in September, 1975. Other stages included establishment of a Constituent Assembly, the reorganization of the system of local Government, lifting of ban on political activities and creation of new states.

Corruption which has for long been a social ill of the Nigerian society, was given serious attention by Ramat's regime. The great purge of corrupt and inefficient officers which involved all sections of the society helped relatively to refine Nigerian's attitudes towards their work. The clean-up shook the whole nation as both the military and civilians were involved. The massive purge was very drastic. Officers were retired on account of old age, inefficiency, poor health and malpractices (Ediagbonya, 2007: 34).

The emphasis on the corrective policies inevitably induced the government to establish its credibility in the society. The regime was determined to inculcate some values into the public life of the Nation, such as discipline, official responsibility and probity (Ibid, 34). The setting of public complaint

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Bureau in 1975 all over the states by the regime helped to save the oppressed and exploited Nigerian commoners.

General Ramat MurtalaMuhammed created seven states bringing the total number of states in Nigeria to 19. The creation of these states no doubt brought the government nearer to the people, thus giving many people opportunities to participate in the government of the country. Industries and social amenities were now required by more areas, thus creating more opportunities for employment.

A. E. Gboyega notes that this creation ended the structural imbalance which existed in the form of huge regional groupings dominated by the three big ethnic groups which used these as bases for ethnic chauvinism (Gboyega, 1979). General Ramat Muhammed would be remembered for initiating the idea of changing the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja. It would be recalled that General Ramat Muhammed set-up a committee to look into the suitability of Lagos remaining the Nigerian capital. The document transferring the capital from Lagos to Abuja was signed and sealed by him (Ediagbonya, 2007: 35).

On the issue of higher education, General Ramat Muhammed's regime effort was highly commendable. The regime established seven new universities to make sure that each of the 12 States inherited, had a University. W: Akpochafo observes that just like the earlier Universities, these new ones gave a big boost to University admission (Akpochafo, 1990). In the 1974/75 session, student enrolment in Nigerian Universities was 26, 023 but in the 1977/78 session, this had risen to 48, 927 because of the new institutions (Ibid). Akpochafo notes that the seven new Universities were:

(a) The University of Calabar which started as the Calabar campus of the University of Nigeria.
(b) The University of Jos which used to be a campus of the University of Ibadan
(c) The University of Ilorin
(d) The University of Sokoto (Now Usman Dan Fodio University)
(e) The University of Maduguri
(f) The University of Port Harcourt
(g) Bayero University, Kano (Ibid)

In the area of foreign policy, it was very robust and superb. It was the advent of the Muhammed regime in 1975 that began an era of activist and dynamic foreign policy since Nigeria's independence in 1960. It was the beginning of the boost in Nigeria's declaration of Afro-centric posturing, an era that saw the country taking more than casual interest in events happening in and around Africa. In fact so much pride is often attached to this era by Nigerians. Ray Ofoegbu posits that Nigeria's foreign policy was more of Africa centered (Ofoegbu, 133-134). According to him, in the first year in office of General Muhammed, the radicalism with which it tackled foreign policy matters shook Nigeria's relations with the major powers, especially USA (Ibid). His support for MPLA Angola against USA preference for FLNA and UNITA is a case in point (Ibid).

The recognition of the MPLA was a watershed in the struggle against colonization, racism and apartheid in the continent in particular and the world in general. According to Ogunsanwo, the government sent Brigadiers Obasanjo, Olutoye, Garba, Shuwa, Captain Dan Suleiman and some other federal Commissioners to arouse support for the MPLA (Ogunsanwo, 1978:25). It is important to note that this Angolan issue was later to create strains in Nigerian-American relations. President Gerald Ford in a January 1976 note to African leaders declared:

"It is our hope that the OAU will insist upon a prompt end to all foreign involvement in Angola. My government would support such an initiative and co-operate with it, provided other distant powers to do as well. We would also in that case urge South Africa to end its involvement (President Gerald Ford's note to African Leaders in January, 1976).

In response, the Federal Government under the leadership of General Ramat Mohammed rejected completely this fatuous attempt by the Ford Administration to insult the intelligence of African nations and scorn the dignity of the Blackman (Federal Ministry of Information, January, 1976). The government implored other African leaders to reject the American pressure so as to "enable us build the Africa of our choice" (Ibid).

Within this period General MurtalaMuhammed led the Nigerian delegation to the emergency O.A.U summit on Angola which was held in Addis Ababa from January10 to 13, 1976. He told the leaders of Africa that "because of its (Angola) strategic importance in South Atlantic, because of its natural resources and because of the strength and dynamism of the MPLA, Angola had become an area of great interest strategically", thus South Africa and the United States were obviously frightened (New Nigerian, January 19, 1976).

He concluded the historic address by informing his colleagues that;

Africa has come of age and it is no longer in the orbit of any extra-continental power. It should no longer take orders from any country, however powerful. The fortunes of Africa are in our hands to make or mar. For too long have we been kicked around, for too long have we been treated like adolescents who cannot discern their interests and act accordingly … (Ibid).

Weaknesses

It is however important to observe that General Ramat Muhammed had some obvious weaknesses. According to Kolawole, Ramat Muhammed, the Head of State projected a business-like personality (Kolawole, 2001: 111). He appeared to be self-assured and self-conscious to a point of arrogance (Ibid). Oluleye asserts that:

He was a bully. He did not tolerate opposition except he realized you cannot outwit him… He had fixed ideas of things. To him, every human organization was a military machine that can be worked on or dealt with without question… He had very little respect for constituted authority while he would not tolerate disrespect from subordinates (Oluleye, 1985:74).

David Jemibewon one of his military governors, saw him as "a fiery extrovert and animpatient "person. (Jemibewon, 1978:43). According to Obasanjo, there was a consensuses within the military that Muhammed had traits of indiscipline and that in spite of this, nobody could call him to order (Obasanjo, 1980: 57-58). Muhammed's personality made it difficult for him to engage in the politics of accommodation which he perceived as

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capable of slowing down the decision making process (Kolawole, 2001:111). In spite of the weaknesses however, General Ramat Muhammed remain the best adjudged military head of state in Nigeria. His regime has been described as the golden era in the history of Nigeria, particularly its foreign policy.

General OlusegunObasanjo: February 14, 1976-September, 1979

General OlusegunObasanjo came to power on 14th February 1976 following the assassination of General Murtala Ramat Muhammed on 13th February, 1976. He was the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters under MurtalaMuhammed. He accomplished the political transition programme that ushered in AlhajiShehuShagari as the nation's first executive president under the presidential system of government in October, 1979. General Obasanjo inaugurated Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) to conduct elections. The ban on politics was lifted on Thursday, September 21, 1978 and five political parties were registered. The five political parties were:

a. Nigerian People Party (NPP)
b. Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN)
c. Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP)
d. People's Redemption Party (PRP)
e. National Party of Nigerian (NPN)

At the end of the election, AlhajiShehuShagari of NPN won the election. This return to civil rule helped in no small measure to revitalize the lost glory of Nigeria among the comity of Nations. General Obasanjo launched the operation feed the Nation on May 21, 1976. The aims were to make the nation self-sufficient in basic food needs and to sensitize and wake-up food and cash crop production initiatives in Nigerian. Again it was targeted at enhancing self-sustenance and reduction of dependence on imported food items. Akin Iwayemi noted that, the land use Decree of 1978 under the Obasanjo's administration helped to facilitate large scale farming and the decree allowed an individual to own up to 500 hectares farming land and up to 5,000 hectares of grazing land through the acquisition of a customary right of occupancy (Akin, 1979: 57). Again Akin (ibid) further observes that the indigenization decree introduced by General Gowon was reviewed by General Obasanjo which enabled several small businesses to be owned by Nigerians (Ibid).

Other achievements of General Obasanjo were 1976 Local Government reforms which brought about a uniform local government system through the country, the introduction of Universal and compulsory primary school throughout the country, whose purpose was to eradicate illiteracy, develop and enhance adequate supply of manpower to meet the development of the economy among others.

Since 1954, when the federal system came into operation in Nigeria, local government administration has received considerable scholarly attention (Adamolekun, 1979). The comprehensive reform of local government administration in 1976 restored participatory values (Adeola, 2008). The 1976 reform acknowledged the government system as government of local level, established by law, with defined powers (Ekpoand Ndebbio, 1998).

In the area of foreign policy, General Obasanjo, succeeded in putting Nigeria prominently on the world map as Africa's foremost nation. The regime stepped up its virulent opposition to racism and apartheid and recorded considerable successes in securing real independence for Zimbabwe (Ibid, 112). The regime was faithful to the cardinal ideology of making Africa the centerpiece of its foreign policy. According to W. AladeFawole in the process, it bagged the honorary title of "front line state" and succeeded in monopolizing the chairmanship of the UN Anti-Apartheid committee throughout the period (Fawole, 2003).

General Obasanjo had a radical posture towards Britain as Anglo-Nigeria relations suffered a severe setback. Fawole also notes that America was not spared, as the relations with USA was strained, especially during the period of President Gerald Ford (Ibid). However the relationship improved during the reign of President Jimmy Carter who was interested in the freedom of Africa States.

Weaknesses

General Obasanjo spent over ₦144 million to organize FESTAC. It is possible that if the money expended was used to establish industries, the rate of unemployment could have been drastically reduced in the country. Hence, he was seriously criticized for using such huge amount of money to organize the event. It was also established that, all his efforts to promote agriculture and increase the agricultural output, was an investment in frustration and a day dream. The production level in the country did not change. It can be argued that the human and material resources committed to operation feed the Nation was a complete waste because the programme failed to produce the desired result.

However, it was sadly observed that the reviewed indigenization decree in 1977that ownership or majority shareholding does not automatically imply control of such enterprises was also ineffective. Even after seven years of the first indigenization decree, control was still elusive, as it was manipulated by local capitalists to widen further the income gap between the rich and the poor. In spite of the above flaws associated with Obasanjo's regime, Nigerians remained grateful to this great military General and Leader for successfully handling over power to a civilian government in 1979.

II. Conclusion

Military Administration in Nigeria started in 1966 after the abortive coup of January 15, 1966. Following the failure of the coup, the most senior officer in the army, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi became the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Hence, the first military administration in Nigeria was established and the military dominated the political scene in Nigeria between the periods of 1966-1979 which is the focus of this paper. Although Major-General AguiyiIronsi started well by ensuring Nigerians of firm, honest and disciplined leadership, some of his policies created problems for Nigeria which led to the counter-coup of July 29, 1966 in which he was assassinated. His promulgation of Decree No 34 was very provocative. Hence his regime was short lived. General Yakubu Gowon had lots of achievements to his credit which many saw as laudable. E.g. Decree 9 which reverted the country back to the federal structure and the release of political prisoners from jail. Others were the

creation of states, through Decree No 14 of 1967, the economy grew at a very high rate of 8percent annually between 1966 and 1975 and the real national output increased. The foreign policy thrust of his regime was very robust and the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps in 1973 was highly commendable. However he could not sustain this laudable achievements because of greed and inordinate ambition.

The overthrow of General Yakubu Gowon brought into power a more dynamic and radically inclined military ruler in the person of General Murtala Ramat Mohammed, whose era is seen as glorious period in the history of Nigeria. Apart from his numerous achievements, corruption, which has for long been a social ill of the Nigerian society was the cankerworm of the period. Ramat Mohammed's achievement in the area of foreign policy was superb. In spite of his proactive approach to end corruption, some workers were unjustly sacked from service without proper investigation. General Ramat Mohammed created seven additional Universities. General Obasanjo's administration will be remembered as successful in transition from military era to a democratically elected government in Nigeria. In spite of the numerous achievements of General Obasanjo, he was highly criticized by Nigerians over the money wasted in organizing the FESTAC in 1977. It was found that the military rulers contributed much to the development of Nigeria in spite of their flaws. The paper concludes that military rule could be positive in contribution. It is also inferred that the management of governance goes beyond the type of government to enlist commitment from the leaders (either military of civilian) before able development could be achieved and sustained.

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