

The Military & The State in Nigeria

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TO BOOKS

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE NON-MILITARY USES OF THE MILITARY IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

The Nigerian military has changed substantially from what it was at political independence and in the first half of the decade of national government. According to Ihonvbere (1998) "at initial time, the military organisation was certainly looked down upon by the larger society as a place for dropouts, thugs and persons who could not succeed in other spheres of life. The level of education, even among the officer corps, was very low and many had been promoted to higher ranks as a precipitate reaction to the departure of European officers and the need for indigenous leadership in the armed forces". Military professionalism of managing conflict was emphasized.

However, since the military seized power in 1966 and even moreso since the civil war of 1967 to 1970, the military has changed. There has been non-military uses of the military in Nigeria. Thus, a work on the non-military uses of the military becomes imperative. There are categories of performance, economic, social, religious, administrative and political.

The armed forces have been assigned the role of the protectors of Nigeria's territorial integrity. If historical events and empirical evidence are allowed to be our guide, the Nigerian military is not satisfied with its assigned role. According to Chikendu and Kalu (1996), "after all, soldiers are Nigerians, fully emotional and human. As everyone else, they desire to be loved, they fall in love, marry, bear and rear children". In spite of their stern faces, starched uniforms and straight-jacket behaviour, soldiers have a lot of concrete needs and contributions to make in

the society in peace time. Like everyone else, soldiers have the twin problem of unsatisfied needs and limited resources and there should be roles and assignments to meet these needs in peace time.

According to Okpara (1997), in a world without war or coup, the Nigerian military can occupy itself with secondary roles and second career skills. Apart from soldiers managing violence which is their professional role, they engage in other areas that are relevant to both the military and the society at large.

According to Oyeleye (1979:1) academic interest in non-military uses of the military in Nigeria and Africa at large started recently. Until the middle sixties, students of African political changes directed their attention to the roles of political parties, charismatic leaders, institutional transfer, and such other independent political forces. It has been suggested that the lack of interest in the military as a force and the non-military uses of the military is due, in large measures, to the manner in which the imperial powers granted independence to African countries. Unlike in many Latin American countries, independence in most African countries was granted through constitutional negotiation rather than through military action. This peaceful transfer of power has considerable advantage to other political forces in the task of nation-building. The failure of these forces helped to prepare the way for the military uses in other areas.

According to Ifesinachi (2000) since the Nigerian independence on first of October 1960, there have been non-military uses of the military in Nigeria. Nigeria has been ruled by the military for more than twenty-eight years out of the forty years of her independence; the civilian democratic government has had only about eleven years to govern. It is no overstatement here to say that no meaningful analysis of Nigeria's socio-economic, political, religious and other developments can be made without touching essentially on the non-military uses of the military in Nigeria. The military has a lot to contribute in the non-military areas of a nation's development and this chapter discusses the non-military uses of the military in Nigeria.

The Non-Military Uses of the Military

Ordinarily, the army is an instrument of the state to protect it from the outside and sustain it on the inside. According to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999:217):

"There shall be an armed forces for the federation which shall consist of an Army, a Navy, an Air Force and such other branches of the armed forces of the federation as may be established by an Act of the National Assembly. The Federation shall subject to an Act of the National Assembly made in that behalf, equip and maintain the armed forces as may be considered adequate and effective for the purpose of:

- (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 by the president but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly and,
- (d) Performing such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly.

As part of its traditional role of managing violence, the non-military uses of the military are in various ways and include the following:

Political Functions

The soldiers have been used by the colonialists to contain the elites in Nigeria, thus, giving it a political function as against the traditional role of the military. In a speech titled "politics is not for soldiers" made by Ghanaian president, Osagyefo (Redeemer) Kwame Nkrumah in September 1961 to the cadet of Ghana military Academy at their passing out parade, the soldiers were warned to desist from being used in politics.

It was stated:

"You must at all times have confidence in your superior officers in the army, in your commander-in-chief, and in the political leaders in government. You must have confidence that the government is doing what is best for the country and support it without question or criticism. For it is not the duty of a soldier to criticize or endeavour to interfere in any way with the political affairs. You must therefore leave that to the politicians whose business it is".

Today the military are being used for political purposes and they carry out political functions in Nigeria. The soldiers are not only being used in politics in Nigeria but have become the ruling and reigning class and impliedly, part of the alliance of classes and the ruling class in the country. Nigeria was scarcely six years old from political independence from the colonial masters when, due to crises that led to political instability, the military struck to seize political power. Since this debut the military have actively been involved in politics.

The army officers have considerably been made use of as politicians in highly placed positions of policy-making that some people tend to regard the governments as essentially diarchical. Nwankwo (1984) sees diarchy as civil-military democracy. All civilian regimes in the country have accommodated and so much depended on military. They make extensive consultations with the military when important political or other decisions have to be made. Azikiwe (1974) emphasizes that nowadays the role of the armed forces does not end at the defence of the realm. He stated that the military in other countries have been involved in a structure of civilian-military rule for the performance of governmental functions. Traditionally, the armed forces are not trained for this political function. Their function is to defend the realm and this involvement in politics apart from their traditional function has helped in good governance and political stability.

Bringing the heads of the armed forces in active politics alongside the civilians is done in Nigeria. According to Luckham (1971) the military are used by the civilian government to gain power and as arbiter of political conflicts as was the case from 1966 to 1967, leading to the civil war. Perlmutter (1979) puts up a view that military in politics is a fact of every political system in Nigeria in particular and the third world in general. The military are in politics to the degree that it is a key partner of civilian politicians. Nwankwo (1984) emphasises that the military officers are involved in politics. He outlined four forms of interactions between the military and civilians in politics, namely: (a) Civilian employment of retired soldiers, (b) Direct participation of retired soldiers in politics, (c) joint activities in professional associations or clubs and (d) Co-operation of civilians in military regimes".

Furthermore, in Nigeria, military tribunals are used in trying cases that have some political flavour. Tribunal for political trials even though is outside military professionalism should be encouraged. Even though Ibiro (1995:21) emphasizes that this is why lawyers generally preach deep commitment to the rule of law and cautions against setting up tribunal to try political cases but

there is nothing wrong in involving military lawyers in treating political cases.

Administrative and Management Functions

According to Ovwasa (1995) "public administration deals with the science of getting things done in the most efficient ways in the public sector. Public administration is normally carried out through the public service of any nation". Public service includes all institutions that are primarily geared towards the provision of the basic needs of man in society. It is the crux of any society.

Military officers are involved in day-to-day decision making for the running of the government. Perlmutter (1977) emphasizes that today the professional soldiers should serve as bureaucrats and should acquire modern skills of administration and management. The military are involved in both policy and administration in all political systems and governments. The military officers involve in administrative functions, inject themselves into the process of deciding public questions. Of course, membership to the highest decision making organ of government is most of the time based on personal connections with the man at the helm of affairs. The result is that some military officers are appointed to various administrative positions as part of their second career. For example, according to Okpara (1997) "one Brigadier Oteri because of his academic qualification, had a rapid leadership opportunity of becoming the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering at the Nigerian Defence Academy. He also served at a time as the institution's Ag provost". By intervention some military officers like Abacha, Babangida, Obasanjo, etc, became heads of state and got involved in the administration of the country. In the military circle there is even the belief that the effective running of the administration is solely their responsibility and to this understanding various decrees were promulgated in the country. Olowu (1977:11) lays emphasis on methods of making laws for the administration of the country and stresses that "once decree has been published or by means of radio or television broadcast or by publication in writing or in any other

form, it becomes law as far as the courts are concerned except where the name of the Head of the Federal Military Government is mis-spelt or probably omitted". The military at various stages in the administration of the country introduce concrete ideas.

Economic Functions

According to Okeke (1997) "Economy is that part of the structure of a society which provides and distributes the material resources needed by the members of a society". From this we deduce that within the framework of the whole social system of a society, the economy may be conceptualised as a particular sub-system of roles and activities focused around problems of adaptation to the physical environment. These problems include not only the satisfaction of individual needs for food, clothing and shelter, but also the production of resources for attaining collective goals.

Nigeria is one of such third world states whose economy depends largely on actions of government. To that effect, the serving government, in the pursuance of economic objectives of the country, involve military officers identified in their circle. For example general Jemibewon served in the regions of Mohammed/Obasanjo, Abacha, and in the interim government of Ernest Shonekon. Industrial ventures should be designed to involve the military. Some Banks and indigenised companies are owned by soldiers.

According to Oyeleye (1979), since 1970, Nigeria has experienced the most rapid economic growth in its history because of the involvement of the military in economic field. The indigenisation decree and the land use decree are two important decrees which changed the orientation of industry and agriculture. While the indigenisation decree fostered national economic independence and self reliance, the land use decree removed obstacles such as the land tenure system to large scale agriculture in the rural areas and minimised land speculation in the urban areas.

Religious Function

In Nigeria, political manipulation of religion has led to many uprisings and the subsequent uses of the military in the process. Religion is not a new entrant in Nigerian politics. According to Williams (1997:184), as a cleavage, it has always been present but was hitherto over-shadowed by the more pronounced cleavages such as ethnicity and class. With the ebb of ethnic/economic politics, religion assumed the status of a veritable instrument for Nigeria's power brokers, and the military officers are used in the religious struggle in order to achieve their political selfish interests. The soldiers should have some of their members rather serve as pastors and reverend fathers in their organisation. This will go a long way to encourage discipline in the military.

The first time when religion made its appearance in state affairs was during the civil war. This was in the form of the Biafran propaganda that the civil war was an attempt by Muslims to wipe out christian easterners and achieve the long-cherished dream of dipping the Koran in the sea. Nigeria took further sink in the religious mire with the involvement of the federal government in pilgrim operations in which it becomes more involved with passing years. Religious problems have today attained an unprecedented significance in Nigeria. The most frightening dimension of this development is the seemingly high visibility of the state in propelling this monster using the soldiers. According to Williams (1997) the tirades of arguments that the state wittingly or unwittingly fuels religious disharmony incapacitates it in the function of properly managing state, group, or inter-group discords and thus resorting to the use of military in religious affairs.

In a specific instance, the surreptitious entry of the country into the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was done by the use of the military and it brought the country to the brink of a religious war. Religious unrests are becoming more common. They have engulfed particularly the northern states of Nigeria and have occasionally resounded in the West, especially in Ibadan, Oyo state and the military were used on each occasion in the religious

manipulation and in quelling the religious crises in the country.

Miscellaneous Roles

According to Okpara (1997) "the Nigerian military can occupy itself with secondary roles and second career skills in peace time. He discussed these under secondary roles and dual professionalism. He emphasized that the military should take on secondary roles in peace time as follows:

- (a) Engineering projects-such as building of roads, bridges drainages, canals, etc.
- (b) Ecological Reclamation - such as flood and erosion control channels.
- (c) Highway rescue-such as dealing with the high rate of accidents on the roads.
- (d) Teaching-at either the command primary or secondary schools or at such service schools as the Nigerian Defence Academy at Kaduna and the command and staff college, Jaji.
- (e) Second career training-as an engineer, doctor, surveyor, educationist, computer system analyst, etc.
- (f) Training exercise-the only way any military organisation can make itself fit for winning a war, is to train hard during peace time.

Dual Professionalism

Okpara (1997) stresses that military dual professionalism should be based on the premise that:

"a professional soldier, as a servant of the state, commits himself primarily to his profession of

"managing violence" while also reaching for a second career that would enable him re-enter the civilian society without the fear of being jobless".

This entails that the military authorities encourage officers and men to acquire second career skills by going for degree programmes in areas that would be relevant to both the military and the society at large. For example, nothing prevents a retired soldier with a master's degree or a Doctorate degree from becoming a lecturer in any military school or university like Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna.

The non-military uses of the military should also include assignments for the military in peace time which should include holding of symposia, seminars and workshops in order to give the soldiers the opportunity to discuss and debate to satisfaction, such issues as: (a) military discipline (b) the duties of professional soldiers (c) strategies for conflict resolution (d) Needs of retired soldiers and their families and ways of meeting these needs (e) Dilemma of the family of a dead soldier and the strategies for survival etc.

Nigerian soldiers should make adequate use of their peace time like their foreign counterparts. In Britain for example, soldiers are not only actively involved in scientific and medical research, they are also the providers of meteorological services and information for both military and civilian air and sea navigation and other related services.

The Implications of the Non-Military uses of the Military in Nigeria

The non-military uses of the military have positive and negative implications. The military have remained the most dominant elements in the prevention of the nation from total disintegration and collapse. The military have also remained the most powerful arbiters of social control. Many Nigerians have

become more politically aware with greater political recognition for Nigeria due to political diplomacy of the military in international meetings, resolutions and crucial anti-apartheid campaigns.

According to Ovwasa (1995) the military brought a sense of urgency to the Nigerian public administration. This they did by infusing a sense of urgency into governmental processes and machinery. For example, the soldiers take more seriously the files and memoranda sent to them than the civilian premiers and their ministers. They pursue social and economic development with vigour and energy. The military are development conscious. As a result of the non-military uses of the military, the Nigerian military are also expected to be associated with the range of industrialisation, expansion of the agricultural sector, banking, commercialisation, increased standard of living for many citizens and increased national income.

History will be replete with dossiers of achievements that will follow the non-military uses of the military in communication expansion, road development and mass transit programmes, expansion of health facilities, mass education and growth of intellectual institutions, energy development and water supply schemes.

However, non-military uses of the military may not promote democratic ideas and values which are the prerequisites for sound political development. The non-military uses of the military since Nigerian independence could not restore stability and democratic government. The military officers have disrupted political evolution of Nigeria. Bringing the military in politics continuously exacerbate political instability in Nigeria.

By wide implication, the continued non-military uses of the military in Nigerian politics have permanently deprived the Nigerian civilians that monopoly of political leadership legitimately ascribed to them. As a result of the non-military uses of the military, the traditional esprit-de-corps, professionalism, trust, confidence, etc, which had earlier pervaded the military profession have certainly not attained the same level today.

The non-military uses of the military in the administration of the country have increased the tempo of corruption and the military are not equipped to stamp it out. Military involvement in administration of the country has led to the impairment of discipline in the society. The military have demonstrated acute incapacity to deal with the problems of Nigerian economy. They have not solved the problems of inflation, stagnating agriculture and devaluation of the naira. Unemployment and inflation still persist in Nigeria. Some religious crises where there may be involvement of the military either by politicians or the government in power to achieve a particular political goal or selfish interest could have negative implications for the stability of the country.

Non-military uses of the military may not be said to be a resounding success as far as nation building is concerned. The military have shown that they can be as prone to divisive loyalties as our politicians.

Conclusion

Sociologically, the non-military uses of the military make for both good and bad government and these may affect civilians and soldiers alike as they exist under the same government and state. Thus, both have equal stake in good governance and the maintenance of law and order but the military should be more involved in their constitutional responsibilities. There is need to encourage military professionalism and secondary roles in peace time in Nigeria in order to ensure stability in military organisation. The military in Nigeria and other third world countries should try to face the challenges of the third world countries of discovering and increasing their war-heads and other strategic needs for defence and also be involved in the politics and other non-military areas of the army. The Nigerian Military must learn to engage in both secondary roles and dual professionalism during peace times and in the constitutional role assigned to it; that of defending the territorial integrity during war times. On the other hand, the civil society needs to be more aware of the needs of the military and see them

as partners in progress. If this is done, it will go a long way to provide a conducive atmosphere needed for non-military uses of the military in Nigeria. The military should be helped to engage in other roles outside their constitutional roles and carry them out as expected of them in the country. The civilian power seekers are also enjoined to desist from manipulating the military in order to occupy public offices. Nigeria cannot afford to continue to be the lame and sleeping giant, for it is high time we woke up and restore stability in Nigeria.

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