

Military and The National Question: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: This study examined the role of military in the resolution of the National question in Nigeria. In carrying out the study, secondary data was relied on. Based on the investigation, the study revealed that the military intervention is motivated by the issues bothering on the National question and have made several attempts which yielded no desired results. The reason was because of their commanding structure and insincerity of purpose.

Key words: Military, National Question, constitution, ekpoma, resolution, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Since independence Nigeria has been grasping with the challenges of resolving the issue bothering on the National question. Several efforts has been made by successive governments at addressing this issue and yet remain unfortified dream. The focus of this study is to examine, the role of the military in resolving the problem of National question and the extent to which these efforts has yielded its desire result.

Conceptual clarification: To enhance the easy comprehensive of this discourse, the central concepts are mentioned before.

Military: The military comprises the army, navy and air-force. The military is a bureaucratic organization that utilizes and manages violence. There is high emphasis on hierarchy, centralization, discipline and obedience to higher commands (Gutteridge, 1975). Military institution otherwise known as the armed forces is the instrument of national security that is charged with the responsibility of defending the country from external aggression. It is also used to put down internal aggression depending on the intensity of the aggression. Constitutionally, the military has no room or business in politics. It is illegal for the military to take over through a coup the instrumentalities of government from elected representatives of the people. However, military rule has been a recurring phenomena in most African states, Nigeria inclusive until very recent (Okhaide, 1996).

National question: National question identifies challenges that must be addressed if a country is to survive and

those critical issues that have been left un-resolved and now threaten the nation state. The National question can be viewed from two dimensions. The first dimension on the National question is concerned with how the political union of diverse ethnic groups or nations or peoples who are conscious of their diversities should be ordered and run. Also, it is about whether relations among the diverse groups should be geared towards integrating the groups into a single nation or granting self determination to them. It normally arises when groups within the political union (the state) seek advantages over others, try to dominate others or seek for measure of independence or self determination (Toyo, 1993). Thus in broad terms, trying to resolve or remove the tensions and contradictions that often arise from such inter-ethnic relations and which manifest in form of fear of marginalization, domination, inequality, unfairness and injustice in inter-ethnic group relations (Anyanwu, 1993).

The 2nd dimension is the class relations. Here, the focus is on the tensions and contradictions that arise from class inequalities and antagonisms between the rich and the poor in the society. This is centered on similar issues of how to remove the fear of perpetual marginalization, domination, inequality, unfairness and injustice in poor and rich class relations.

Commonly, however this dimension of the National question is interwoven with and indeed over shadowed by that of inter-ethnic group dimension and is inseparable from it. Indeed, many ethnic conflicts have their foundations in class conflicts but found their expression in inter ethnic group relations (Ntalaja, 1987). The National question is a world wide problem and it comes up as an issue in Africa, Europe, Canada, USA and other countries

of the world. In Nigeria context, the National question has been a major issue before and after independence (Offiong, 1995).

The military and the management of the National question: Constitutionally, Major General J.T. Ironsi and subsequent military heads of states would not have had any business in Nigeria politics. The 1960 Independence Constitution of Nigeria and subsequent constitutional documents clearly spelt out the fundamental principles on which the governance in Nigeria should be based. As one of the agencies of government, the Nigerian armed forces made up of the army, navy and air-force are charge with the responsibility of defending Nigeria from external aggression, maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its border land, sea and air. Suppressing and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president, performing such other functions as may be prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly (Parliament).

The implication of this arrangement is that military activities are in aid of civil authority. Thus, the military subordinate to civil government. Military intervention in national politics in developing countries was becoming endemic particularly in Sub-Sahara Africa about two third of these countries in this region experienced military intervention (Idise *et al.*, 2005).

The outline of the country (Nigeria) was delineated by Britain; prior to their colonization by the Britain, the ethnic groups that eventually metamorphosed into what is today known as the Federal Republic of Nigeria were not only independent of one another but were also at different stages of economic, political, social and cultural development. Right from this period to the present date, ethnicity, domination, marginalization and resource control has reflected as National question. Then, the question now is how have the military attempted to solve these problems?

Following the coup that brought General Ironsi to power in 1966, he attempted to unify the country and hence the promulgation of Decree No. 34 of 1966. The Decree attempted to abolish the Federal System which was seen as the high point of political problem in Nigeria. Thus the practical effect of which was the unification of the country. The Decree, though well intentioned was short lived. It was misinterpreted by a section of the country as aimed at ensuring Igbo domination of the Nigerian state. Therefore, when Gowon succeeded Ironsi in July 1966, he not only abolished the Decree but he set machinery in motion for the creation of the 12 states structure and hence, a return to a federal arrangement. This singular action was directed at breaking the emerging

danger which regionalism and imbalance had brought about. The states were therefore created in such a way that it gave the north and south 6 states each. The Gowon administration also introduced the National Youths Service corps scheme and established several federal government colleges to enhance the national building efforts. The Murtala/Obasanjo regime also set up a commission headed by Irikefe to resolve once and for all the issue of minority agitations for state creation. Based on this, 19 states structure emerged.

The Murtala/Obasanjo regime encouraged by the nation building efforts of Gowon, took over the control of all universities in Nigeria and the radio and television stations nationwide. It added the federal character concept. In its essentials, the federal character was designed to enhance integration of the various ethnic groups to ensure a balanced representation of all the groups. In other words, it was designed to ensure equal representation in the affairs of government at both national, state and local government levels.

It was formally entrenched under Section 14 of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Murtala/Obasanjo regime also made it mandatory for all political parties to reflect national outlook on integration. Much later in 1985 General Ibrahim Babaginda increased the state to 30, also revenue allocation has been a problem, the minority from oil producing states (Niger Delta) has been demanding for a fair and just distribution formula of oil revenues which led to the establishment of Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. Also, in an effort to look into revenue sharing formula, a permanent commission was set up by the Babaginda administration to over see revenue sharing arrangement. The name of the commission was labeled National Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (NRMAFC). Apart from the allocation of revenue, this agency was charged with the responsibility of mobilizing revenue and ensuring fiscal efficiency. Lastly, Abacha regime also put in place constitutional conference especially to look into revenue sharing formula. He equally added more six states bringing Nigerian states to 36.

ANALYSIS

In analyzing the answers to the National question by the various military regimes so far take for instance, the unification decree by Ironsi, it was misconstrued by a section of the country as aimed at ensuring Igbo domination of the Nigerian State. In other words, the unitary system appeared to have confirmed the fear of the north of eastern domination. The stage was set for series

of crises, demonstration and his eventual overthrow. The National Youth Service Corps Scheme introduced by the Gowon administration at the long run is not yielding its objectives in the sense that corp members can go to the lent of influencing their posting to their states of interest, some even influence it to their home states which invariably acts as a distortion to the original aims and objectives of the scheme. In addition, the federal character which was designed to enhance integration of the various groups, from experience, we know that it has been more of a problem than a solution. For example, it is seen by many as unfair, especially as it affects admissions into universities and unity schools and even employment into federal establishments. Some scholars have argued that any attempt to make unequal people to be equal is unfair.

The Murtala/Obasanjo regime making all political parties to reflect national out look made non-sense of this provision as most of the parties then still had ethnic out look during the Second Republic for example, the UPN, NPP and NPN were re-incarnation of AG, NCNC and NPC of the old. On issue of state creation and better revenue sharing formula, at the moment, the minorities from the oil producing areas of Niger Delta are intensely demanding for good sharing formula for oil revenues. They are demanding for a fair and just distribution formula of oil revenues.

They are specifically asking for an upward review of the distribution formula which will adequately compensate for their loss of farming lands, ecological and other problems created or caused by oil explorations in their areas of domain. Hence, the incessant militancy crisis in this region. Coupled with these, most groups are still demanding for more states especially those who feel marginalized.

CONCLUSION

The effort by the military in solving these National question on the surface appear to be quite impressive but a critical analysis reveals that these measures are defective in the sense that the problems they came to solve are rather being escalated. In other words, a critical analysis of these measures has shown that it has been defective. Partly because of the commanding structure and their insincerity of purpose. They are equally more guilty of what they accused the politicians of corruption.

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