

A LEAP FROM “PRAETORIAN GUARDIANSHIP” TO A COTERIE OF POWER BROKERS: NIGERIA’S 4TH REPUBLIC AS THE 3RD REICH OF THE MILITARY ESTATE

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IJASR 2019

VOLUME 2

ISSUE 3 MAY – JUNE

ISSN: 2581-7876

Abstract – From January 15, 1966 when the overzealous demarche of the hotheaded Majors ushered in a watershed in the contours of the Nigerian political environment, the military has aggressively cleaved onto power with a plethora of sanctimonious justifications. Since the first putsch, the immaculate praetorians have overtly “guarded” with a well engineered structure which has culminated in them engendering three realms (1979-1983; 1993; 1999-present) of either outright military “guardianship” or control through a coterie of “retired” military politicians, recently punned as “repentant democrats”. This work focuses on the elements of military influences and control over the central government in the Fourth Republic. Utilizing secondary data, the work argues that the military, through its veteran club, has not just exercised overwhelming influence on the post-1999 Nigeria, but has also become a receptacle of the “philosopher kings” who either rule or decide who “rules”. The work concludes that the malicious process that characterized the 1999 transition to civilian rule was crafted to entrench the pontifications of the military veterans and their perpetual relevance, but, at the expense of genuine democratization, good governance, and active youth participation and assertiveness in politics. The work therefore calls for the dismantling of the “civilian-military estates” and its analog and insidious structures which have over the years, bred under-governance while impeding altruistic and innovative political culture.

Keywords: Military in Politics, civil-military relations, democratization, good governance, prebendalism, military estate, youth participation in politics, innovative political culture.

Introduction

Every sovereign state possesses a defined territory and is summarily responsible for the security and protection of its recognized geo-space. This culminates in the formulation of protocols and defence policies of which military security policy is an aspect of. The military security policy, which Huntington (1957:1) has defined as “program of activities designed to minimize or neutralize efforts to weaken or destroy the nation by armed forces operating from outside its institutional and territorial confines”, is the *raison d’être* of the military institution. While the function of the military force “is successful armed combat”, the duties of military officers include: organizing, equipping, and training of the force; planning of its activities; and direction of its operation in and out of combat. Thus, a professional military specialist is an officer who is peculiarly expert at directing the application of violence under certain prescribed conditions (Huntington, 1957:11&12). The military institution of a state thus, is that unit whose specialty resides on the monopoly of violence utilized in protecting a nation when called upon to do so (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018:75). It is through the military that the Clausewitzian “other means of policy” is achieved by the state (See Clausewitz, 1976: 28-29). This is aptly summarized by Huntington when he asserted thus:

While all professions are to some extent regulated by the state, the military profession is monopolized by the state. The skill of the physician is diagnosis and treatment; his responsibility is the health of his clients. The skill of the officer is the management of violence; his responsibility is the military security of his client, society. The discharge of the responsibility requires mastery of the skill; mastery of the skill entails acceptance of the responsibility. Both responsibility and skill distinguish the officer from other social types. All members of society have an interest in its security; the state has a direct concern for the achievement of this along with other social values; but the officer corps alone is responsible for military security to the exclusion of all other ends (1957:14-15).

A plenitude of literatures abound on the role of the military to the state but the most interesting are those treatises which aim at prescribing the best model for relations between the civilian and the military to ensure utmost professionalism on the path of the military and functional control of the military by the civilians. The foremost of such debate was that instigated by Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The Soldier and the State*. Huntington identified

two models – subjective civilian control (maximizing civilian power) which is only possible where there is absence of professionalism within the army corps; and objective civilian control (maximizing military professionalism) which is best at excluding the military maximally from politics. Hence:

objective civilian control is thus directly opposed to subjective civilian control. Subjective civilian control achieves its end by civilianizing the military, making them the mirror of the state. Objective civilian control achieves its end by militarizing the military, making them the tool of the state. Subjective civilian control exists in a variety of forms, objective civilian control in only one. The antithesis of objective civilian control is military participation in politics; civilian control decreases as the military become progressively involved in institutional, class, and constitutional politics. Subjective civilian control on the other hand, presupposes this involvement. The essence of objective civilian control is the recognition of autonomous military professionalism; the essence of subjective civilian control is the denial of an independent military sphere. Historically, the demand for objective control has come from the military profession, the demand for subjective control from the multifarious civilian groups anxious to maximize their power in military affairs (pp.83-84).

To Huntington therefore, divergent (objective civilian control) model is most preferred since it maximizes professionalism and incubates a “military mind” which is “pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist, and instrumentalist...realistic and conservative” (p.79).

The Huntington model had birthed a myriad of critiques and counter-theories such as Janowitz’s (1971) sociologically modeled “convergence” theory; Feaver’s (2003) “work” and “shirk” agency theory; Schiff’s (2009) “three partners concordance theory” and a myriad of others. Irrespective of their analytical and theoretical frameworks, all seem to agree to the fact that the military should steer clear from politics and subdue itself to civilian control in a “cooperative relationship that *might* involve separation *but does not require it*” (Schiff, 2009:32).

There exists also, literatures on the activities of the military in Nigerian politics. Part of the puzzles yet to be given attention by scholars is the exceeding dominance of the Nigerian political space by the cabals of x-servicemen. As would be discussed in this work, the anatomy of civil-military relations in Nigeria is a very complex one. Not just has the Nigerian military invoked the nostalgia of the Roman Praetorian Guards “remembered as an instrument of tyranny, adept at both creating and removing emperors, whose loyalty could be purchased by the highest bidder” (Eaton, 2014: 234) but literally perpetuating, perpetrating and camouflaging its influence over the polity via a guild of “emergency workers” and “kingmakers” on fatigue, off fatigue and beyond fatigue; emergency workers always on a standby for a justification to strike and wrestle power from the civilians and kingmakers disguising as statesmen to ensure that either someone from the “inside” or someone who is loyal to an “insider” runs the central polity of the nation.

For the first four decades of Nigeria’s independence, civilian government had ruled for a meager ten of the forty political years. In fact, the second republic (1979-1983) was apparently a Greek gift which was doomed to expire as the guards were emotionlessly watching – anticipating the right moment and alibi to call the shot - this was apparently the first civilian estate of the military where in actual sense the civilians ruled but as a puppet for, and under the watchful eyes of the “professional” guards. The 1993 military scam popularly labeled “June 12” paved way for yet another civilian estate of the military estates – this one was more obvious for the guards only “stepped aside” but not without a watchman who will reclaim its ownership in fortnights. The unfortunate drama which we’ve labeled as “legitimate coup” bestowed on the military the present third civilian estate of which the distinguished “formers” and “retireds” have systematically seized the control of the national power structures and have recycled their dominance and relevance at the expense of genuine democratization and political maturity. Talk about the cabals, talk about the “men that make things happen”, talk about the “actual rulers of Nigeria”, talk about the “men behind redistribution of resources and political recognition”, talk about kingmakers – you need no flashlight to locate them for the writings are so clear on the wall.

The purpose of this work yet again, is to attempt an exposition of the dominance of the Nigeria’s fourth republic by a coterie of retired military men who have systematically held the civilians to ransom and are currently perpetrating their influence of the guise of quaver mimicked fatigue as “formers” and “retireds”. We proceed by giving an overview of the character of civil-military relations in Nigeria; identifying the various civilian estates the

military has enshrined for itself and finally doing an explication of their influence and control of central government of Nigeria in the fourth republic.

Historical Background to the Character of Civil-Military Relations in Nigeria

It could be argued that the Nigerian army was an inheritance of the Queen/Western army corps which was supposedly known for its acute commitment to its traditional duties while abstaining from all dimensions, its anathemas; an assumption coloured in superficial colonial analysis. However, scientific history of the Nigerian armed forces has shown that the military, which also performed policing role, was a tool in the hands of colonial political agents who often time than not, utilized it in driving its political means of “pacification”. Ekpo, Agorye & Tobi (2018) have observed that rather than defence, colonial army corps was involved in other insulars as extortion and terrorizing of civilian populations. Even so, the chequered history of the Glorious Revolution, the escapade of French soldiers like Napoleon and Charles de Gaulle and avalanches of other instances, have proven that the western military culture was never solely ‘western’ nor sacredly ‘professional’.

The above has rendered the structuring, from the historical purview, of anthologies on the character of civil-military relations in post-colonial Nigeria problematic. In analyzing the character of civil military relations, Huntington (1957) has argued, it is necessary to define the nature of the officer corps. To Schiff (2009:32-3), it lies in unraveling the degree of understanding that exists between the military, the political elites and the citizenry in regards to: social composition of the officer corps; political decision-making process; recruitment method; and military style. To Feaver (2003:2), it is more of reconciling the degree of military autonomy to its violation of civilian control principle and the parameter that defines civilian control as against “disastrous” civilian interference. Choi & James (2005:112) has further asserted that measuring the character of civil-military relations might involve obtaining “predicted values for civil-military relations in numerical terms by taking into account societal militarism, past influence of military leaders, military conscription system, and severity of threats to national security”.

The nature of the Nigerian army corps, its composition, level of political control, conscription process and influence of military leaders had assumed an unbalanced, unconventional and “street” personality even before independence. As earlier hinted, the progenitors of this revered institution had groomed it on a volatile basis and had left it riddled in abnormalities and absurdities before, during and after its Nigerianization.

In terms of composition and conscription, the outlook of the Nigerian military is not just shaped by its historical antecedents but sociological complexities of the country which is best represented by the degree of diversity of its population. For a country “blessed” with some 250 ethnic divides, with the largest three eager to outmaneuver each other, the army corps was bound to be reduced to a minor political party composed of lethargic politicians awaiting full activation by circumstances. It was apparent that every move would be given regional and ethnic colouration and that the army corps would be polluted and negatively influenced.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, commission into the Nigerian army was based on merit, rather than quota. Due to their early exposure to education, *inter alia*, the Igbo dominated the independent Nigerian army corps while most of the NCOs were northerners. While the southerners dominated the technical units, the northerners dominated the combat units. Southern dominated army corps controlled by ethnic ridden northern dominated politicians fuelled more diffidence and perceived insecurity on the part of the later. According to Siollun (2009:27-28) there were concerted efforts by northern politicians to truncate Igbo soldiers from filling army posts vacated by the departing British officers; attempts like this subjected the military to dangerous civilian politics and skirmishes which complicated the patterns of civil-military relations and as well destroyed the tattered fabrics of professionalism which the army corps had possessed. For instance, rather than encourage northerners to acquire formal education and qualify for recruitment into ranks, the northern politicians preferred to toe the path of Machiavelli by focusing so much at realizing an urgent end irrespective of the possible repercussion the means might have on the military institution. As expressed by Siollun (2009):

Northern concern over Igbo presence in the officer corps led to the introduction of a regional quota system into the army recruitment process. The quota system allocated a percentage of army recruitments to each region, with the northern region being guaranteed 50% of officer admissions, and the eastern region and western region each

having 25%. The educational requirements for officer admission were also reduced, thus making it easier for less educated northerners to enlist (28).

Inversely, from 1962, the northern controlled Balewa's government discouraged further enlistment of graduates into the infantry (Ademoyega, 1981:42-3). It was through such policies, Siollun (2009) has observed that military politicians such as Ibrahim Babangida, Abdulsalam Abubakar, Mamman Vatsa, Garba Duba, Gado Nasko, Sani Bello, Muhammed Magoro, Buka S. Dimka, Sani Abacha and Sani Sami benefitted and perpetrated. The politicization of conscription was so conspicuous and took some respected northern politicians to the river to directly fish a balance for northern ranks to balance the ethnic composition of the army corps which was gradually diminishing into a political party. While the then Minister of State (Army) Ibrahim Tako Galadima is recorded to have personally visited schools and personally "enticed" students into enrolling in the army (Siollun, 2009:28), Muhammadu Buhari's enrollment was purely politically induced. He is quoted to have confessed that "the Emir of Kano told one of us that if soldiers could overthrow a line of kings descended directly from the prophet, it could happen anywhere. So we should go and join the army" (Siollun, 2013:20). He never disappointed; Buhari participated in almost all the coups and change of government in Nigeria.

In the south also, some enrollment (especially of the graduates) were purely politically inclined. Some who were perplexed with the political drama choreographed by politicians and were eager to force through change via the unconventional ways; they preconceived of themselves not as soldiers, but "nationalists and revolutionaries who were nostalgic of, and hoped to replicate the feats of military politicians such as Gamel Nasser, Kemal Ataturk, Fidel Castro, Napoleon Bonaparte, Muhammed Ali etc." (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018:78). For instance, Adewale Ademoyega, one of the Majors behind the January 15, 1966, had brazenly vituperated thus:

I came to the Army with a heart pointed towards finding a solution to Nigeria's political problems. Before I was actually commissioned, I had met and established a solid relationship with two young officers of the Army, Nzeogwu and Ifeajuna, whose hearts pointed in the same direction as mine. It seemed as if the three of us were destined to play the big and decisive role together (1981:36).

Indeed, they played even a bigger role than they had anticipated albeit, not a decisive one.

The implications of the politics of "composition" and "conscription" on the Nigerian army cannot be over-emphasized in analysis into the nature of the relationship between the civilian and the military in Nigeria and such have affected military professionalism over the years.

In terms of political/civilian control over the Nigerian military corps, the tragedy of diversity also played an ignoble role in ensuring that the army corps fails to elude politicization nor maximize professionalism such that the Huntington (1957) subjective civilian control can best explain. Subjective control, as hinted in our epilogue entails maximizing civilian power and minimizing military power. As predicted by Huntington, "large number, varied character, and conflicting interests of civilian groups" renders the maximization of civilian power over the military problematic. Hence, "maximizing of civilian power always means the maximizing of the power of some particular civilian group or groups". Paradoxically, "subjective civilian control involves the power relations among civilian groups". Civilian control is an anathema to professionalism; they are mutually exclusive and coarsely on an opposite linear trajectory. In the words of Huntington (1957):

Subjective civilian control is, indeed, the only form of civilian control possible in the absence of a professional officer corps. In its various historical manifestations, subjective civilian control has been identified with the maximization of the power of particular governmental institutions, particular social classes, and particular constitutional forms (81).

Though the postulation of Huntington above predates Nigeria's existence as an independent entity, Nigeria is now by retrodiction, a part of the "historical manifestations" he had deduced. The politics of civilian control over the military became manifest in the Nigerianization process of the Nigerian military in 1965. The politics of selecting a Nigerian GOC brought into full bare, the meddling, interference and politics which the army corps was bound to be subjected to. Even as Brigadier Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi was the most senior among the Brigadiers (Samuel Ademulegun, Babafemi Ogundipe, and Zakariya Maimalari), it took some great diplomatic efforts to convince and

persuade the leader of the ruling NPC, Sir Ahmadu Bello and his “lieutenant in Lagos” to consent to his appointment as the new GOC in 1965. The rest of the politics to balance and/or control the military by the northern elites is implicit of our analyses above.

One of the earliest clashes between northern and southern leaders after independence was the desperation regarding the political control/command of the Nigerian military between the Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. It could be recalled that the colonial government largely utilized the army to settle personal and individual ‘scores’ in the name of pacification – a legacy which had made the control of the military a coveted pearl for divergent groups in the interest-mosaic elites of the first republic Nigerian state. For instance, during the 1964 Federal Election crisis where the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) (the President’s party) boycotted an elections for fear of its being rigged by the ruling party, the Nigerian National Alliance (the Prime Minister’s party), there were depressing efforts by both the Prime Minister Mr. Balewa and the President Dr. Azikiwe to wittingly exert control over the military and use it not just to intimidate the other, but determine the trajectories of the elections outcome. Due to the “widespread malpractice in the elections, Dr. Azikiwe had refused to call the Prime Minister to form a government but had called the heads of the army (Major-General Welby-Everard), navy (Commodore Joseph Wey) and police (Louis Edet) “to remind them of their oath of loyalty to him in his position as commander-in-chief...The President and Prime Minister jockeyed for control and loyalty of the army, as many thought that Azikiwe might use the army to intervene to break the political deadlock” (Siollun, 2009:18).

The desperation for this subjective civilian control of the army was sparked by several negative precedents. As history has it, there were insidious utilizations of the army corps to settle political problems ignited by the fragmented Nigerian political elites. For instance, the northern Politician loathed ethnic agitations by the Yoruba in Ilorin and the Tiv in middle belt. According to Bola Ige (1994:55), “these agitations of course annoyed the emerging Northern leaders; they too made up their mind to deal with those agitations ruthlessly and bring the Tiv and Yoruba leaders to heel”. The rudderless for this ruthless action was of course the Nigerian military. The brutality meted on the Tiv is known to have further politicized the Nigerian military. The declaration of state of emergency by the Balewa’s government in the Western region and deployment of troops in the 1962 election crisis was also a supposedly utilization of the revered state institution by a Nigerian political elite (the Prime Minister) against another (the leader of opposition). In fact, one of the deployed soldiers, Adewale Ademoyega, in his autobiography was convinced that “there was no rioting of any sort and there was no general disturbance of the peace anywhere in the Region. The necessity to declare a state of emergency had existed only in the imagination of those who wanted it for their own political end” (1981:36-7).

Such precedents as described above had convinced the political elites that control over the military offered even more advantage than control over the electorates – for with facades, they could be deployed and the highest encumbrances neutralized in no time. Convinced with such line of thoughts was the then leader of opposition, who was indicted with concrete evidences of planning a violent overthrow of the government. Part of the indictment testimonies was that he had approached Yoruba military officer, Samuel Ademulegun, for this purpose; Awolowo’s co-accused and Action Group secretary, Samuel Ikoku, confessed to the authenticity of this desperate attempt by a faction of the civilian to control the military and use it for a putsch (Siollun, 2009:16).

The various scenarios thematically discussed above created some “military demons” who would have no second thought at challenging civilian supremacy – it effaced in entirety, sense of apolitical reasoning and transformed the “armed servants” to “praetorian guards” who did not just become gallant politicians but also created political parties amidst them with recourse to ruling and opposition impulse. Consequently, the influence of the military and its leadership in Nigeria became so gargantuan and as described above, reduced the military and the officer corps to a conglomeration of armed petty politicians. To start with, the military was phenomenal in the planning, execution and truncation of the first military-led coup in January 15, 1966. This parachuted the military to the inglorious apogee of political decision-making processes. They would, like leech, glue clannishly to power (1966-1979; 1983-1993; 1993-1999) (see Ekpo & Agorye, 2018:75-7) and regenerate themselves as power brokers and forces to reckon with in Nigeria’s second, third and fourth republics – the apparent reich which they had created to perpetuate and perpetrate their influences under differing guises.

The First (1979-1983) and Second (1993) Reich of the Military Estate

When the juvenile Nigerian politicians indoctrinated, initiated and baited the military into the lowest nadir of its professionalism in the second week of January 1966, two things were glaring to smart minds. Foremost, a military as divided and polluted as the then Nigerian military would, at least for some decades, know no peace. The coup casualties, the profiteers, the benefactors and the politics which surrounded the transfer of power from the distraught civilian politicians to the military had created an illusion and conspiracy theories of a supposed ethnic group feigning the drama to collapse both the military and political structures of the state in its fist. Secondly, it was apparent that the direction of the swinging pendulum has changed. The officers, with their maximum control over the state political, economic and violent apparatuses (without checks or balances) was surely going to fizzle off the civilians, consolidate on their gains and infiltrate the civilian populations to exert influence and maximize their covert and overt power games.

In just six months time, the deterioration in the military ethos dampened further, resulting in the mutiny which led to the widespread infighting among the various 'political parities' that constituted the then military. J. T. U. Aguyi Ironsi was advertently replaced by Yakubu Gowon. The aftermath was a bloody thirty months bloodletting which quadrupled the size of the Nigerian military from 10,000 in 1966 to 250,000 in 1970 (Siollun, 2013:4). There was a new trend – that of using the promise of transition to civilian rule to engender, with less antagonism, military autocracy. When General 'Jack' postponed his hitherto 1976 transition date, he was deposed and disposed of by General Murtala Muhammed who had worked out a feasible schedule for civilian come back in 1979. As politicized and polluted armed forces, nationalism was increasingly defined from the context of individualism and selfishness – these are the likely concepts that could qualify the February 13, 1976 assassination of General Muhammed by one Lt. Colonel Dimka and associates. The attempted squash did not prevent Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo (Muhammed's second in command) from, as Ekpo & Agorye (2018:76) has described, trailing Muhammed's policies and successfully handing over power to the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, in 1979.

The big question is, what type of power did General Obasanjo hand over to the civilian President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari? It was absolutely a nominal power – a Greek gift which he himself would become an accomplice to its seizure. It was the first Reich of the military estate. It must be noted here that the second republic which General Obasanjo engendered was a semi-puppet administration of the military echelon that was bent on either controlling or reclaiming power at the slightest provocation. According to Max Siollun, in his *Soldiers of Fortune* (2013), the military saw itself and acted as "national governmental custodian, and an emergency rescue team that could be called out to depose the civilian government anytime the public got faded up with its policies. It regarded itself as patriotic defender, rather than Nigeria's physical defender against external aggression". It was with such brazenness that a military coup announcer in the 1980s is recorded to have uttered thus "I and my colleagues in the armed forces have, in discharge of our national role as promoters and protectors of national interest, decided to effect a change in the leadership of the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (7).

The grip of the military on the Shagari regime cannot be overemphasized. From appointments, to projects and even control of the civilian and military institutions, the military had their fair share and had successfully intimidated the civilian lightweight into submission. Top serving military echelons are known to have overtly nominated some ministers and top government appointees who served at the interest of their benefactors. Siollun (2013:7) has observed that:

Although Nigeria had an elected government, some officers could not divorce themselves from politics. Some senior military officers drafted a list of government ministers they wanted President Shagari to remove, and nominated their preferred replacements. They delegated their boss, Lt. General Wushishi, to submit the list to Shagari on their behalf.

Top echelons of the military overtly mutinied, resented and braved their civilian commander-in-chief. Major General Muhammadu Buhari, for instance, declined the President's order for him to withdraw Nigeria's troop from the Malian soil in 1983. Coups were brazenly planned and leaked with no fear nor recourse of its

repercussions since they were so certain of the feebleness and trepidation that engulfed their civilian leaders – even though armed with the supreme law of the land, Shagari knew that he was surrounded by wild beast that were ready to devour him in slightest provocation.

Some civilian conspirators who had profited from the ungodly associations of the military were fanning the embers of coup then and where concertedly or inadvertently baiting the ousting of the Shagari's puppet regime. M. K. O. Abiola was one of those fingered. It was observed by Chief Bola Ige (1994:396) that Abiola would never forget the benevolence of a particular military junta who had awarded his newspapers “contract of hundreds of millions of naira”. President Shagari himself commented on the ignoble financial sponsoring of some ‘coupists’ by a “well known Nigerian business tycoon” (Siollun, 2013:11).

Being an implant and the first civilian estate of the military, it was easy for the military to strike and ‘reclaim their mandate’ when situations were ripened. By the 1st day of January, 1984, President Shagari sneaked out of his official residence and took to his heel upon being informed of the impending coup by the praetorian guards by Solomon Lar, the Plateau State governor. It should be known that General Obasanjo, the author of the Nigerian second republic, was a ploy to this putsch. He was even offered the covetous office but he preferred to remain in the corridor for his ‘integrity’ sake; the coupists even labeled their unfortunate government as an offshoot from Obasanjo's. Siollun (2013:26) believe they were right because “many of the new regime's senior figures served in the 1976-1979 regime...[and] sought to continue the corrective policies of the Murtala-Obasanjo military era”. With the caliber of vipers left behind, the question of a coup was not how, but when. It is right to say that Obasanjo might have handed over to Shagari as a civilian but the power base of the civilian estate was left with the military that used it to rubbish the ‘innocent’ civilian regime.

The second Reich of the military estate was the so-called interim government which succeeded the legendary scam christened “June 12 Elections”. The military ethos had become exceedingly bastardized and rotten such that the military did not just think of themselves as being politicians, but superior statesmen of which constitutional recognition, they agitated. They were not ready, willing or supportive of transition to civilian rule – in fact, they berated such thoughts with sanctimoniously engineered premonitions. In his 2013(206) opus, Max Siollun had rightly observed that:

The officer representing the [Babangida's] political faction felt that plans for democratization were premature, opposed a fixed timetable for military withdrawal from politics, *and argued that the military had as much right to rule as any other segment of society...*[and] further argued that even when power was eventually returned to civilians, *constitutional provision should be made to allow military participation in the political process, and that military should reserve the right to give the President an ultimatum and a deadline to fix crises, failing which the military could intervene* (emphasis added).

Cogent plans were put in place to ensure that the military, which had transformed into a miniature of political party realized the emphasized phrases above through any (il)legitimate media possible. For instance, when the Constituent Assembly presented the draft of the proposed 1989 Constitution, its Section 4(1) was expunged; “the AFRC [Armed Forces Ruling Council] deleted section 4(1) of the draft constitution which clearly aimed to punish military coups. The section stated that “any takeover or control of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof by any person or group of persons other than in accordance with the provisions of the constitution shall remain a crime at all times” (Siollun, 2013:217).

When the Babangida's regime reluctantly proposed a transition program for another republic amidst episodes of shenanigans, stratagems, ruses and postponements, its intentions to make it a post-regime puppet was brazenly sonorous and nauseating – but the civilians were ready to endure it all just to wave goodbye to the men in fatigue. Fiats were promulgated to eliminate potential candidates who were seen as threat to the “guardians” and concerted efforts were taken not just to control the registration of political parties, but its ideology and funding. Consequently, the military government registered and handed over two political parties (National Republic Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP)) to the civilians and influenced the emergence of candidates all in a subterfuge that would maturate in the tragedy of “June 12 Election”.

The June 12, 1993 election was apparently annulled because its outcome unwholesomely threatened the anticipated estates. With the emergence of the famous, affluent and intransigent M. K. O. Abiola as victor, all hell

was let loose. Since he was dangerous to the military, its friends and establishments, the elections had to be nullified to pave way for a malleable and acquiescing puppet administration. This was the origins of the infamous, illegitimate and erratic diarchy constituted to safeguard the interest of the praetorian guards.

By August, 1993, the Interim National Government (whatsoever it meant) was constituted as General Ibrahim Babangida “stepped aside”. It was a conglomeration of opposites – notorious military coup specialists like Gen Sani Abacha and as usual, juvenile civilian politicians. Though the Interim Government was semantically “headed” by Chief Ernest Shonekan, it was a diarchy of which the Generals that “stepped inside” had the prerogative of inculcating the art of statecraft and matured politics to the juvenile civilian politicians. We only wish the diarchy was genuine but like the seasoned diapers, it was disposed in fortnights by the “praetorian guard” who had lived, mastered and died through the proceeds of coup d’état, General Sanni Abacha.

Of course the military in the third republic never ceded power to the civilian. The Interim Government was just a conduit through which the praetorian guards “stepped aside” and further “stepped inside”. They exercised maximum control over it and lived by it like their previous estates – then, influence was exerted not just by the ones in fatigue but also with those off and without fatigues.

A Legitimate Coup? Military Veterans and Politics in Nigeria’s 4th Republic

“Nigerians and the international community, especially the United Kingdom and the United States...fooled themselves into believing that the return of civilian government in 1999 signaled a break with the past” – Anonymous in Campbell (2011:23)

When Karl Maier (2000) titled the first chapter of his book, *This House has Fallen*, as “A Coup from Heaven”, he apparently intended an euphemism for the ‘divine’ wind that blew across Nigeria’s Aso Rock in June 1998. It is very doubtful if he had thought of the 1999 transition on the purview of military regeneration of its influence on a legitimate basis. Maier (2000:19), albeit, had inferred that “the tone of Obasanjo’s speech sounded as if he had turned the tables on the former military dictators, that his own rise to power represented another coup, this time by the civilians” – he was marginally right – it was another coup not by civilians but the men off fatigue; they were all collaborators and were (in)advertently ready to dominate the central governance mechanism of the Nigerian state in their favor though not as military Generals but veterans, and repented democrats.

The year 1999 marked a watershed in the political history of Nigeria. To start with, the dreaded General Sani Abacha who had perfected structures to succeed himself as a civilian head of state had, in cryptic circumstances, met his ‘untimely’ sepulcher in June 8, 1998; this had culminated in the emergence of the ‘revered’ General Abdulsalami Abubakar as the famous head of state who conducted elections and transferred power from the ‘military’ to ‘civilian’ government (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018:76). Albeit, the proof of genuine intention of liberalizing the power corridors of the nation’s power engine house has remained a subject of debate. There are worthy reservations by scholars and political analysts as regards the politics and calculations around the magnanimity and expediency which propelled the 1999 transition process. The extent to which the military was civilianized and the civilians militarized is repercussive of the demarches that preceded and succeeded the 1999 democratization processes. The military had evolved a plenitude of power blocks and political circles within and without which it utilized to supervise the birthing of a quasi-republic that would, if not remotely controlled, advance its interest and the interest of its top echelon. Succinctly construe, “even when it came to democracy...there was [and still] no escaping the military’s influence” (Maier, 2000:23).

The livewire of the Nigeria’s fourth republic, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is identified as the background upon which the intentions of the soon-to-be retired guards had furnished and insured their perpetual influence. Though prefaced with the pronoun “we”, it was a fraudulent fiat which was wittingly bequeathed the country via Decree No. 24 of 1999 bereft of popular input (Ekpo, 2017:32). It enshrined pseudo-federal structure and entrusted so much power into the fist of the head of executive and the federal government – be it on issues of recognition, harnessing, exploitation and redistribution of resources, the center cum president held sway. Commenting on military midwived constitutions, Okeke & Chukwuka (2013) iterate that:

It is not a hidden secret to admit that each of these constitutions protects the interest of the writers more than that of the governed. The military elite' classes were more comfortable and protected by these constitutions. The writers of these constitutions benefit from it when they succeed in bringing to office as president their military colleagues whether retired or tired in military service. It is also beneficial to them when their co-horts are placed at varied positions of authorities to determine the faith of the citizens. The provisions of these constitutions do not spell out punishments for their activities, which go contrary to democratic process and the norms of the society. The constitution became coverage for their unapproved actions... When they feel the people's pressure on them to hand over to a civilian rule is high, they decide to write a new constitution in which its provisions will do them no evil (90).

Even so, the decorated waif nicknamed "constitution" is found wanting by Okeke & Chukwuka (2013:93) for its unequal separation of powers, inadequate devolution of power and ambiguous definition of roles and duties of states and local councils, concentration of resources on the federal government, conflicts on social and religious rights, not addressing the role of traditional leaders and redefinition of citizenship.

With such 'federal weapon' and concentration of power, it was pertinent to 'install' or support an 'insider' not just to perpetuate influence, but to detect and define the trajectories of power politics while reducing the republic to a shadow chessboard manipulated by ex-servicemen.

Consequently, the processes that culminated in the creation of political parties and the conduct of party primaries witnessed a configuration and alignment which brought some groups with peculiar experience and interest [ex-servicemen] in a bond growingly moisturized with some accomplices [civilians] in a bid to realize the legitimate putsch. A fact check on the transition scenario portrays that the vibes behind Gen. Abubakar's successful transfer of power radiates from the later's "parley with the retired army Generals, ex-military and police chiefs among others, whom he hosted and briefed during his government". Furthermore, Obioha (2016:262&263) has noted that "before the 1999 elections, there was a widespread suspicion created that the last military administration of Gen. Abubakar regime and the entire military institution would prefer having a retired General for succession, than a so called "bloody civilian"". This is the history behind the People's Democratic Party (PDP) – a party which was put in place not just to settle old scores, but as well perpetrate and perpetuate military influence.

As argued by Campbell (2013:9), the PDP was a resurrection of the "national, progressive-conservative party" put together by the military echelon to insulate "overt" military rule on terms that favourable to the old guards. Its composition illuminated the dominance of a certain class of which interest, a discerning mind would abruptly adduce. As Okeke & Chukwuka (2013:91) rightly observed, the Party was a bond of 'old comrade' and their clients and godsons who were privy to, and beneficiaries of, the first and second civilian military estates. Estimates advanced by the authors suppose that "no less than 130 rich and influential retired military officers are members of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)... Amongst them, at least 30 are of the rank of Major General and above, while the others comprise mostly of colonels and other ranks" (Okeke & Chukwuka, 2013:91). In the same vein, Bourne (2015:204) has noted that the PDP umbrella was a receptacle of some 46 (16 more than the former estimate) retired Generals – a configuration which earned the Party the sobriquet "party of Army arrangement" (Okeke & Chukwuka, 2013:91). Furthermore, the retired generals had also nurtured a network that penetrated every facet of the Nigerian society and had secured the collaboration of Nigerian civilians who salivated at the prospects of making name for themselves by teleporting to the network. Campbell (2011:26-27) acknowledged this scenario when he averred that:

Knowledgeable Nigerians readily identify persons, all retired generals, who are leaders at the national level around whom these networks often coalesce, the pinnacles at it were, the patronage: their list nearly always include Abdulsalami Abubakar, [Theophilus] Danjuma, [Ibrahim] Babangida, and [Olusegun] Obasanjo... a few of the traditional rulers such as the Ooni of Ife or the Sultan of Sokoto who headed networks of their subordinate traditional rulers. Some, such as [Muhammed Aliyu] Gusau, have powerful networks in their own right but from time to time subordinate themselves to others at the national level.

In a desperate measure to skim out the 'bloody civilians', the retired General, Olusegun Obasanjo was "chosen", dusted and advanced to the citizens by a coterie of power brokers – a group of powerful citizens with military background. Even as Alex Ekwueme, the second republic vice president, had gathered momentum having been a

founding member of the party, the PDP, just as the military, wanted power to return to western part of Nigeria to make up for the June 12 and the barbaric treatment the Abiolas suffered in the hands of the military juntas. Alas, the supposedly wretched Obasanjo who just regained freedom “outspent” Ekwueme in the February 1999 PDP primaries and “won comfortably with 1,658 votes to 521” spared Ekwueme (Bourne, 2015:205). The emergence of the retired Customs boss, Atiku Abubakar is not unconnected with the skirmishes of the veterans – it could be recalled that in the 1993 elections, Atiku Abubakar was the anointed and preferred vice presidential nominee for the SDP by the late General Shehu Musa Yar’Adua. His choice, *inter alia*, could have been part of the explicit reconciliation and restitution by the “old boys”.

Just as expected, the election was a veneer selection of which Obioha (2016:251) has described as *milidemocracy* – a scenario whereby “previous military officers acquire democratic power through stage managed processes”. Not just did Obasanjo win, other veterans found themselves emerging as governors of states, members of National Assembly, President of Senate, Ministers, heads of government establishments and parastatals, revered traditional rulers, captains of industries and “ogas”, “cabals” and “godfathers” (Obioha, 2016; Siollun, 2013; Albert, 2012; Albert, 2005; Campbell, 2011). As earlier stated, General Obasanjo ran his administration as a quasi-military regime, confiding overtly and covertly on the ‘expertise’ and political sagacity of its comrade in-fatigue and off fatigue. His political appointments, style of governance and composition of the central government *ab initio* left little to doubt. In his chapter titled “Who Runs Nigeria?” Ambassador John Campbell (2011) has decried the influence of the ‘military veteran club’ and their stakes in the early Obasanjo government. According to him:

Though civilian government had been ostensibly restored, President Obasanjo’s inner circle was initially mostly from the uniformed services, the military, the police and the customs service: his chief of staff, General Abdullahi Mohammed, had been the director of military intelligence for the Nigerian army before Murtala Muhammed’s 1975 coup. General Theophilus Danjuma, defense minister and a former chief of army staff, had his eye on the military. General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, Obasanjo’s national security adviser, was his link to the northern establishment, especially former chief of state Ibrahim Babangida, and oversaw the security apparatus. His chief “fixer”, Tony Anenih (who had performed the same function for Sani Abacha), was from the national police, while his vice president, Atiku Abubakar, had had a long career in the customs service... Obasanjo also drew on his civilians who had been perennials in military governments. Jerry Gana, who served as minister for information for Obasanjo’s first term, held the same position in the Abacha regime. Ojo Maduekwe, minister of transport in Obasanjo’s first administration and chairman of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) in his second, had also been a special advisor to Abacha (23-24).

Even as a supposed civilian administration, the “old guard”, Obasanjo saw himself as a General and believed that “as a retired Army General, he was not expected to sit in a meeting with someone who retired from the Army as Wo1 or Wo2”, a precept upon which he disapproved the candidacy of Yekini Adejo of the Oyo State PDP as the governorship flag bearer of the party in the 2003 gubernatorial elections. Adejo’s only sin was that he retired from the army as a junior officer (Albert, 2012:12). As an elected civilian President, he “personally involved himself with officer promotions and assignments in a way typical of a traditional patron” (Campbell, 2011:35).

Constituting a plethora of the “cabals” and “godfathers”, Professor Albert (2005; 2012) has in separate treatises taken time to eviscerate the power plays (both benevolent and malevolent) that has manifested between the military veterans, their clientele and succeeding administrations in Nigeria since the commencement of the fourth republic. As godfathers, their agenda is a reminiscent of Albert’s (2005) description viz:

The ‘political godfathers’ build an array of loyalists around them and use their influence, which is often tied to money considerations, to manipulate the rest of the society. Political godfathers use their influence to block the participation of others in Nigerian politics. They are political gatekeepers: they dictate who participates in politics and under what conditions...(p.82) Many of these people were those who took over power during the 1999 elections in Nigeria. They were the ones that released Chief Olusegun Obasanjo from prison and made him the President of Nigeria (p.89).

As cabals, they had attempted, in futility, to hijack the Obasanjo’s administration. They failed to succeed for some two phenomena – Obasanjo’s ‘serious’ military reforms and his ‘insidious’ control over, and redistribution, of the Nigeria’s burgeoning crude revenue to the advantage of his network. For the former, General Obasanjo had

wittingly retired some highly political military personnel (Enor & Ekpo, 2018) and had, by so doing, “depleted the number of northern Nigerian military officers” that could have threatened the stability of his regime. “He also crafted a firm grip of the army under his administration by ensuring that the core north did not dominate the rank and file of his security chiefs most especially during his first term in office” (Albert, 2012:11). As regards the later, Campbell (2011:28) had observed that “with largely unfettered access to Nigeria’s oil revenue as president and concurrently oil minister after 1999, Obasanjo during his first term rebuilt his network and thereby freed himself from being a client of the military coterie that had placed him in power in 1999”, albeit, “their relationship was transformed into an alliance of equals”. The masterstroke was so effective that a retired General and Chairman of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), General Ibrahim Haruna confessed that indeed, “northern Nigerian elites forced Obasanjo on Nigerians as president in 1999” and “tendered unreserved apology to Nigerians for this mistake” (Albert, 2012:12).

The objective of this subhead is not to fixatedly discuss the politics that has played between the members of the “old guards” in their quest to control the central political apparatuses of the Nigerian state but to strike a link on how they are directly and indirectly connected in the processes that has culminated in the change of political power in the country during the fourth republic. Having curled through the implicit and explicit manifestations of such tendencies in the emergence of the General Obasanjo’s candidature and presidency, it is pertinent to argue on the scenarios which ushered in Obasanjo’s successor President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua.

If there is anything that is incontrovertible, even to his “hypocrites” and “sycophants”, it is the dexterity at which Obasanjo abused the power entrusted him by the Constitution and the people through ‘elections’. His muzzling of the Judiciary, even though ignoble, was legendary (See Adeniyi, 2011; Albert, 2012). His incrimination and recrimination of his political foes was recurrent enough for volumes of dissertations. His power of unilateralism at party and national issues could only be likened to the helpless nature of the United Nations before the realist fist of the United States of America. Through several attempts, he had envisioned a prolonged stay at the corridors of power. First by fighting off deleterious influences to his ambition – the incrimination of his powerful vice president, Atiku Abubakar and ‘rogue’ governors such as Ayodele Fayose etc, is repercussive of this judgment; second by attempting a modification of the constitution to shuttle his wayward third term ambition; and finally, installing a puppet of malleable antecedent of which he had hoped to foster a godfather – godson relationship for perpetual power and relevance. Such was the story behind General Obasanjo’s anointment of the Late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua as his preferred successor.

After the successful insulation of his powerful deputy and a grip at the PDP party structure, Obasanjo’s brutality in installing and ousting his perceived ‘clients’ and ‘dissidents’ respectively, had positioned him strategically as a kingmaker. In the words of Albert (2012:13):

Obasanjo took his iron-fist diplomacy to his last days in power. Hence, when he was leaving office in 2007, he did not have to consult any cabal to determine who succeeded him. He unilaterally decided for both the PDP and Nigeria as a whole who the president should be.

Ironically, Umaru Musa Yar’Adua was not even among those who collected the PDP presidential nomination form (Adeniyi, 2017). Confessing to his “innocence” and “good intentions” at handpicking Yar’Adua as his successor, Obasanjo while exonerating himself from the public opprobrium for an ailing ‘heir’ affirmed that:

When in year 2006, the idea came up as to succession; I was convinced in my mind that a Southerner succeeding me will not augur well for Nigeria. You may agree with that, you may not agree. I was convinced in my mind. Now, was looking for those who will succeed me who has three important qualities. One, he has enough intellectual capacity to run the affairs of Nigeria. Two, he has sufficient personal integrity to run the affairs of Nigeria. Three, he is sufficiently broad minded enough-politically, religiously, socially, whatever to manage the affairs of Nigeria. These three were the important things. Then Umoru Yar’Adua [sic] who is now the President, I know he has kidney problem and was under dialysis...When the idea was for him to contest, I asked him and he gave me a medical report. The medical report shows that he has come off dialysis...That was the situation... To the best of my knowledge, he wasn’t on dialysis after that. When the issue of dialysis came, he was well into his first term (as president) which must maybe the kidney transplant is failing, if it hasn’t failed. That you cannot blame on me. You cannot even blame it on him. So to say that I, Olusegun Obasanjo deliberately see somebody

who is an invalid...is highly, highly ungrateful...how can I put so much into this country both in peace and in war and I will begin to run it down...What I need to say is that nobody picked Yar'Adua so that he will not perform. If I did that, God will punish me. There is no reason why I should do that...(Sahara Reporters, January 20, 2010).

The fact that Obasanjo singlehandedly handpicked Yar'Adua is established, albeit, that he was guided by his quest for personalities with intellect, integrity and broad mind would maliciously obfuscate the military connections and 'common destiny' which glued Obasanjo with Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, the elder brother to his preferred successor, Umaru. Shehu Yar'Adua did not just rule as the second in command to Obasanjo during his junta (1976-1979) but was concomitantly jailed alongside Obasanjo by the Abacha regime for a phantom putsch plot. While Shehu died cryptically in prison, Obasanjo had survived and had proceeded to reap the fruit of his years in bondage and solitude. Since Shehu could not survive, it was pertinent that someone from his direct bloodline benefit from the legacies and 'connect' of the Yar'Aduas to the Nigerian military circle – this, more than the variables outlined by Obasanjo, explains the 2007 power play in the PDP and the military magic wand and specter which kept on brandishing new wines in old skins with questionable ingredients. Apparently, the retired generals were actively involved and influenced the trajectories of power direction in the 2007 national elections. Quite visible were characters like Muhammadu Buhari (who had sought refuge in the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP)) and Ibrahim Babangida who was overtly rooting to become the flag bearer of the PDP. Though Obasanjo had successfully nipped them in the bud, the scenario demonstrates the dominance and level of influence exerted by the retired generals and their accomplices in controlling the national politics of the country.

When in 2010 it became apparent that President Yar'Adua was gravely ill and incapacitated, the limbo which characterized the tensed and heated polity is second to the civil war year days. While the "Katsina Maffians" were bent on dragging power, the vice president, Goodluck Jonathan was also eager to consolidate power. Though the #SaveNigeriaGroup could be recognized as one of the major influences that facilitated the activation of a 'seldom clause' for the restoration of normalcy, the actual forces before and behind the stalemate were the 'old guards'. The irony is that while there were rumored coup plots and 'baits', the men behind Jonathan's guts were retired generals. Jonathan's closest advisors as acting president and even president "were all retired generals such as Obasanjo, Danjuma, Gusau, and Andrew Azazi". It was this same class of elites in the National Assembly that decided and ensured that "the stalemate in presidential authority must end, and apparently, it was orchestrated by David Mark, the president of senate and a retired general, possibly to forestall more direct military intervention" (Campbell, 2011:36&34). In essence, the political crisis was heightened by the possibility of a military take-over but it was brought to rest by the efforts of a conclave of "old guards" whose alliance bolstered Jonathan's administration and rejection muzzled him out of office in a historic manner.

The support given Jonathan spanned through the political year, 2011, where he was elected with the only major challenge being that from CPC flag bearer and retired general, Muhammadu Buhari. Jonathan won the 2011 elections because he had *inter alia*, the support of the former generals on the condition that he would not run for second term. The influence of the "old guards" and their subaltern is most explicit in the manner Goodluck Jonathan, a sitting president was demonized and muzzled out of office by the coterie within and outside of the ruling People's Democratic Party.

The most destructive of the hits, heat and demonization came from a retired general of whom he had embraced, *ab initio*, as a godfather. The feuds between the duo started early but gained public notice mostly from 2013 when it became obvious that President Jonathan had taken some key decisions which had brought him at loggerhead with his 'godfather', former president and retired general, Olusegun Obasanjo. There were issues with appointments (as seen in Obasanjo's opposition and feeling of betrayal in Jonathan's appointment of Diezani Allison-Madueke as the petroleum minister) and others but the most infuriating was Jonathan's decision to vie for a second term against the understanding reached between him, his 'godfather' and the northern power brokers. While the rest worked covertly to support the candidacy of General Muhammadu Buhari rtd., Obasanjo made it a point of duty to torpedo the Jonathan administration with political missiles – of which the December 2013 open letter was the most damaging. In the 18 pages letter dated December 2, the retired general lambasted Jonathan, querying his renegeing on the 'one term' understanding; his administration's corruption manifestations and the purported snipers he is training to take out opponents in the forthcoming 2015 elections. The most damaging of it all came in February, 2015, when the retired general tore his PDP membership card – that act signified the

dismantling of the Jonathan administration, which for series of corruption allegations and security challenges was already famous for ineptitude and incompetence.

Whatsoever punitive moves Obasanjo was taking against Jonathan, he was inadvertently rooting for the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, General Muhammadu Buhari rtd. General Obasanjo, in the 2018 Ibogun Day celebration in Ogun State, confirmed his role in the emergence of Buhari as the president.

“I know Buhari and he knows me”, Obasanjo averred – “till the day I die, Buhari will continue to address me as ‘sir’. In 2015, if I didn’t support Buhari, he wouldn’t have won the election”, he further added (Olukoya, 2018).

President Goodluck Jonathan and his handlers had underestimated the powers of the generals and had failed to realize that the fourth republic is still largely a civilian estate of the military. He paid dearly with history canonizing him as the first incumbent president in Nigeria to have been defeated by an opposition.

It might have seemed strange that President Jonathan, an incumbent president, was defeated by an opposition. But, it appeared the balance in the support of the “old generals” had tilted in favour of their comrade whom they rallied around while overtly and covertly sabotaging the Jonathan’s regime. The message was clear – irrespective of who is in Aso Rock, true power formation lies in the hands of a coterie of some familiar faces – they can make, they can mar, they can brand and they can smear.

Unlike the 2015 scenario, the executive president in person of General Muhammadu Buhari rtd. is an “old soldier never die” but does not seem to be in the good book of the veteran power brokers for a second term. While General Theophilus Danjuma has, in a series of censures, registered disappointment with the Buhari administration, General Obasanjo had through open letters, overtly casted virile aspersions on the present regime and has recently endorsed the candidacy of the PDP 2019 presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar. There is a seeming romance between the PDP presidential flag bearer and General Ibrahim Babangida whom the later has welcomed severally on “courtesy” and “stop by” visits. The powerful and former head of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) General Aliyu Gusau was physically present in the PDP primaries and is speculated to have conveyed the choice of Atiku Abubakar by the Generals to party delegates. With a week left before the February 16 presidential elections, it has been reported that “71 Ex-Generals...from the Army, Navy and Air Force” have endorsed the reelection bid of President Buhari (Daniel & Yakubu, 2019). Apparently, the veteran power brokers have regrouped against their own for reasons best known to them. Whatsoever be the outcome of the 2019 presidential elections, it remains a tussle between groups of retired generals and their accomplices. If APC wins, credit goes to the personal followership of the “man of integrity” and the politicking of his “western accomplices”. If Atiku wins, then there is a resurgence of a complete grip of the generals on the central government, pending how long the former will go in doing their benevolent and malevolent biddings.

Concluding Remarks

This work has attempted an explication of the manifestation of the veteran military dominance of the central political structure of Nigeria in the fourth republic. Attempt has been made to connect the 1999 transition constitution, formation of the People’s Democratic Party, nomination of candidates, party primaries, outcome of presidential elections, and trajectories of successions to the tangible and unseen power plays of retired officers. It has been established that for every administration that springs from the fourth republic, credit accrues to a coterie of brokers – a chunk of which comprises the retired generals. In fact, for the whole 19 years of the fourth republic (1999-2018), barely one civilian (Goodluck Jonathan) without an iota of connection to the military has emerged as a president; his emergence was accidental and was galvanized by a retired general who at will, dismantled his administration through sorties of opprobrium and securitizations. The foregoing ensures that either a former general or someone on the good books of generals who is ready to lick their elbow retains power.

The perturbing veteran dominance has not been without spontaneous implications and systemic repercussions. As mentioned earlier, it has fostered an unofficial, yet formally sanctioned “cabal” and “godfather” networks with an enviable isle of preponderance. Additionally, Nigeria’s democracy is still very much infantile with tattered, weakened and abused institutions. Executive agencies are nothing but missiles to be targeted at dissidents and opposition; the case of EFCC being the most embarrassing. The Nigerian Judiciary is insidiously muscled and the

Legislature is befriended (compromised) or chastised (demonized) in endless politics of supremacy. Such ills are often a conduit for grand corruption with repercussions spanning generations.

Importantly, the firm control of the republic by analog minds has preposterously sidelined the youths and has relegated them to “advisers” and “praise singing parrots” whose youthful energy is deflated and “eccentric” ideas downplayed by the “men of old” who have made it clarion that it’s not yet their time. Interestingly, President Muhammadu Buhari, after his assenting to the “Not too Young to Run” bill “jokingly” admonished the youths to “postpone” their “campaigns till after the 2019 elections” – an instruction which its leadership has coincidentally adhered to.

Sadly, no policy objective can be democratic enough to place the “old guards” at the sideline. We must be too careful not to recommend an undemocratic measure in a struggle to fortify our democracy. However, the kingmakers would not be without the loyalty from its chain of clientele. This work, therefore, is an incitement of the masses – the time has come for us to influence directly, the leadership selection process of our country based on our volition than allow our thoughts to be manipulated by a circle of godfathers. If we crave matured democracy, if we crave good governance, if we crave active youth participation, we must think straight and liberate ourselves from this den of systemic Stockholm syndrome.

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