

## **ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS AND SUCCESSION IN NIGERIA**

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### **—Abstract —**

This paper examined the military as an institution and its role in democratic succession in Nigeria. The paper articulated on how various republics in Nigeria failed and what role the military played during these periods. The study relied mainly on secondary data sources, which includes periodicals and other archival documents that provided the required information for the discourse. Data gathered were analyzed through content analysis. Critical and logical analysis of data attested that the military had played the role of distractive force in Nigeria's democratization process. The military institution presented itself and acted in most occasions as a false custodian of democratic principles by initiating and implementing flawed elections for transition. However, emerging facts further suggest that these democratic principles and arrangements put in place by the military were usually faulty and inadequate for sustainable democratic governance to thrive on. Most general elections organized by the military to transit power have been descriptive of *milidemocray*, where previous military officers acquire democratic power through stage managed processes. The military institution therefore has functioned as a partisan organisation where various acts of election packaging were learnt and electioneering overtures acquired, despite its instrumental role in sustaining democracy in the country. This paper therefore concludes that the military has been more of a distractive than consolidation force of democratic transitions, and free and fair elections in Nigeria democracy, since her independence.

**Key Words:** *Political transition, Election, Democracy, Military, Nigeria*

**JEL Classification:** Z10

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since her independence in October I 1960 one of the political problems faced by Nigeria has been the issue of succession from one democratically elected regime to another. Up to the present time, there have been four stretches of civilian democratic governance and republics (1963 - 1966, 1979 – 1983, 1993 and 1999 - Present) which were intermittently disrupted by some military, political, economic and social forces in 1966, 1983, and 1993. Prominent among these forces is military intrusion and coup d'état which has continually contributed to the breaks in linkages between the civilian governments. From observation, democratic transition and succession in Nigeria like in most developing countries has been descriptively problematic. This notion makes sense when the term "succession" is viewed from the democratic point of view. Succession<sup>1</sup> could be classified into orderly or regular and disorderly or irregular.

This debate on transition and succession looms large on the Nigerian political landscape as it occupies an important place in the country's political agenda. Transition to democracy in Nigeria may be viewed partly as a historically inevitable response to transition from non-democratic military regimes in most cases. Nigeria has pursued elaborate transitions to democracy which in effect amounted to a gradual political disengagement of the military from governance. However, what is important at the present state of Nigeria polity is sustainable democratic governance that the country deserves. Against this background, this paper articulates the place of military<sup>2</sup> institution in democratic transition and succession in Nigeria. The questions that bother on the focus of this discourse include: - How instrumental was the military in the collapse of the defunct republics in Nigeria? To what extent has the military been involved in actualization of democratic dispensations in the country? Could the military be a

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<sup>1</sup> Regular succession of national political leadership involves adherence to some set of rules and procedures of transfers, or should at least accord with the spirit of the procedures which have been democratically devised. Conversely, irregular succession would involve a failure to adhere to, or a crisis in the process of transfer (Obodumu, 1992; Blondel, 1980) which often occur through military coups or other forms of insurgencies

<sup>2</sup> The military in this sense is not restricted to the military operated government and established institutions, it includes a broad spectrum of what could be regarded as embodiment of military character and identity, such as present and past military personnel who have been part of military politics.

viable instrument for smooth democratic transition and succession in the future of the country?

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE DISCOURSE**

Based on the pertinent questions set to be addressed in this paper, the main objective therefore is to analyze the involvement of military institution in political transition and succession in Nigeria. The specific objects include:-

- Analyze from a retrospective perspective, the military intrusion and the collapse of Nigeria's defunct republics.
- Analyze the extent of military involvement in actualizing or destabilizing democratic transitions in the country.
- Synthesize the relevance of the military in contemporary fourth republic and future democratic transitions in Nigeria.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The design utilized in this discourse is the qualitative research approach. It is an approach where qualitative data are sought from relevant sources and also analyzed contextually without necessarily involving any quantitative techniques. Based on the nature of data required, this discourse relied mainly on secondary data sources in the process of gathering relevant information. In this process, documented and archival data were extracted from government gazettes, texts, periodicals and other relevant sources. Data generated from these sources were condensed and critically analyzed through content and context analysis where relevant and specific information were distilled from the collections. The deductive synthesis was therefore applied in this process. Synthesized output from the analysis are presented as different sections in this paper in accordance with the set out objectives of the discourse.

## **4. THE MILITARY AND DEMOCRATIC SUCCESSION IN NIGERIA DEFUNCT REPUBLICS: A RETROSPECTIVE PERSPECTIVE**

### **4.1 The First Republic Crisis, Military Incursion and Transition to Democratic Governance**

Following the fall out in the Western region based Action Group (AG) political party and the inconsistent census, the Nigeria first republic virtually collapsed. By

1964, political competition had become very severe, and two major alliance of all the political parties contested the federal elections of that year. Electoral fraud was so rampant and so prevalent that the elections were meaningless and the results of the elections ending in a stalemate (Arikpo, 1967). As Arikpo reported, the events of the 1964 federal elections serious as they were, paled beside those which followed during the Western Region election a year later in 1965 during in which the electorate literally poured gasoline on opponents and set them on fire. The electorate literally took the laws into its hands and the Police seemed powerless. Following the events above, Nigerians believed that the military was the only institution in the country that could stop the political chaos and restore political order and stability, as well as public confidence (Ojibo, 1980). Subsequently, there was a military coup d'état on January 15 1966 where some prominent Nigeria political leaders as well as some high ranking military officers were assassinated.

The military coup d'état of 1966 and eventual ascension to power by Major General Aguyi Ironsi marked the end of Nigeria's first civilian democratic government. This was a welcome development to many Nigerians as it puts to an end to the civilian rule of the country, characterized by political tensions and instability. General Ironsi's challenge was whether or not he could sustain the confidence the nation reposed in the Army take-over (Ojibo, 1980; 26). New political arrangements and programmes were announced by the new head of State, which included a new constitution and handover to the civilian government. General Ironsi promulgated Decree No 34, abolishing the federal structure of Nigeria and replacing same with the new unitary structure. Part of the promise made by his government was to hand over power to the democratically elected civilian government as the military had no desire to prolong its interim administration longer than is necessary for the orderly transition of the country to the type of government desired by the people (Banjo, 1980). Although General Ironsi had the desire to hand over to the civilians, his short stay in office hampered the fulfilment of this mandate. As sectional suspicion mounted, by June 1966 it was already evident that another coup would take place, which later led to the killing of General Ironsi.

Irrespective of the ethnic or political leaning of commentators, it was obvious that the killing of General Ironsi and the enthronement of General Gowon to political power extended the military rule in Nigeria. Unarguably, Gowon's administration came in under a retaliatory coup without strong commitment to democratize

Nigeria polity. Rather, the disgruntled northern region of the country that felt it had lost power as a result of the first military coup was satisfied that they got it back. The Ironsi administration would have at least been given a chance to hand over power to a civilian government before the revenge could have been calculated to be appropriate, if he was found biased to have favoured his ethnic group. General Yakubu Gowon's government that took over power from Gen. Ironsi ruled the country amidst civil war for nine years, after which he was overthrown on July, 1975 largely for a broadcast on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1974 where he reneged on his promise to return the country to civilian rule by 1976. Ojibo, (1980) believed that Gowon achieved nothing substantial or particularly flattering in his 9-point programme<sup>3</sup>.

Following the above, the government of Yakubu Gowon was overthrown by the Gen. Muritala Mohammed regime. General Mohammed set up several programmes that were to define the new and stable political order viable for a democratic transition and succession. As to be expected, the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime that succeeded Gowon's did not waste time in announcing its intention to disengage the military from politics. Thus the only way the regime could get the honour and support of the people was through setting up a realistic time table for the transfer of political power to the civilians accordingly in a four year, five stage programme.<sup>4</sup>

Arguably, the democratic succession or transition to civil rule crafted and implemented by Muhammed/Obasanjo regime has some flaws as observed by Owolabi (1992). Prominent among these flaws was the way the transition planning was conceptualized. The programme concentrated on the political aspects of the transition, without putting in place a solid economic foundation,

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<sup>3</sup> Reorganization of the Armed forces, Implementation of the National Development plan, Repair of war damages, Introduction of a new Revenue Allocation formula, Eradication of bribery and corruption from the national life, Settlement of the question of the creation of more states, Conduction of a population census, Preparation and adoption of a new constitution, Organization of elections of popularly elected government in the states and at the federal level at the Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Stage one: Settlement of the Questions of states; The state review panel to report by Dec. 1975; The creation of states to be completed by April 1976; The constitution drafting committee to submit a draft by September 1976. Stage two: Local government elections without party politics elected and partly nominated to consider the draft constitution by October, 1978. Stage three: Ban on politics to be lifted in October, 1978 and the formation of political parties. Stage four and five: Federal and state elections to be held in 1979 (Banjo, 1980).

which made fulfilment of electoral promises by succeeding civilian regime practically impossible. Besides, there was the complete lack of any plans as regard the mobilization of the citizenry, especially one that would inculcate a new democratic culture needed for the survival of the succeeding government. Five new political parties were established and registered without adequate political education to the people. Owolabi, further noted that there was the problem with the behaviour of the military during the transition programme, specifically the removal of the provision of an electoral college and substituting it with a second popular election, if the first attempt fails to produce a clear winner. This period however marked the journey to end military administration since 1966, and the beginning of the second republic.

#### **4.2 Beginning and fall of Nigeria Second Republic**

The beginning of the second republic was marked by the declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and his consequent installation as the Executive President of Federal Republic of Nigeria, which was not wholeheartedly welcomed by all citizens. The grudge is more pronounced among those that believed that the military was not completely neutral in the transition programme of the Obasanjo regime. This casted doubts in the minds of the people about the legitimacy of the democratically elected government of the second republic because the transition programme designed and implemented by the previous Military administration was seen as handover conspiracy (Haruna, 1988). Many Nigerians believed that Alhaji Shagari was too slow in getting things done compared to what Prof Awojobi referred to as “the dynamism of the military”<sup>5</sup> (Afenaga, 1980). Progressively, by 1981-1983 it had become increasingly clear that there were serious lapses in the practices of liberal democracy and federalism on which the second republic had constituted under the transition programme. With hiccups in the polity, there was inevitably stalemate and paralysis of the governmental process. Politicians did not live up to the high expectation which had been generated by the coming of the second republic. Subsequently, the conduct of 1983 state and federal elections was marked by serious allegations of electoral fraud and similar malpractices, political violence, harassment and victimization of party supporters by the parties in power at the

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Awojobi is quoted as saying that he was missing the dynamism of the military. To him, the military rulers had their plans and when they come out with their plans, they make it without my iota of doubt where they are really going, to come through purposefully.

federal and state levels, which resulted in erosion of confidence in the electoral process. The post-election political climate therefore created the anticipated ground swell of popular support for a coup that forestalled the progression of the second republic, which therefore marks the ultimate end of the civilian regime in the second republic (Olagunju, *et al.* 1993).

### **4.3 The Midwifery of the prolonged Third Republic without an Executive President**

The coming into power of Major General Mohammed Buhari in 1983 marked the end of second republic civilian regime and the beginning of the march towards the third republic. The new head of administration enunciated a ten point agenda programme (Buhari, 1984), which unfortunately did not include the question of return to civil rule. He believed that the major problem that Nigeria had was how to revive the economy of the country, ensure discipline at home and respect abroad (Sunday Times, 1984: 11). This created an impression that the transition to democracy was not a priority issue to Buhari administration. This led to lack of popular support for the Buhari administration and consequent condemnation of the head of state who was overthrown in August 1985 (Olagunju *et. al* 1993).

The August 27, 1985 coup which was premised on economic and political reforms brought Major Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to power. There was from the beginning, a disguised commitment to military disengagement and to the required economic, political and socio-cultural reforms which are vital to the creation of a viable environment for re-democratization on Nigeria. However, the military disengagement or transition timetable as well as content and trajectories of the reforms were vague, which made them subject of robust debate within the Gen. Babangida administration. Within the first 100 days, Gen. Babangida embarked on what looked like a meaningful political and economic consolidation. The period between September 1985 and January 1986 was significant in the foundation of the third republic as it starkly and poignantly showed (Olagunju, *etal*, 1993: 88). To further strengthen the march to democratic governance, the administration established some socio-political infrastructures, such as Center for Democratic studies (CDC) and Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), as the administration viewed public mobilization as a vital process in the actualization of democratic governance. The Constituent Assembly and Constitution Drafting Committee were also engaged in the process.

In the process of political transition under Gen. Babangida administration, lots of uncertainties were revealed. Prominent among this was the issue of terminal date of military rule, which was not explicitly clear in the transition calendar. The programme was staggered between 1987 and 1992, which attracted series of conflicts in its actualization. According to Olagunju, *et al.* (1993) the political Bureau contained two proposed conflicting time tables of major events and land marks in the transition. A major departure from the original time-table irrespective of the various shifts and changes was the constitutions of the national assembly without an executive president for the country. This led to the apogee of political administration in Nigeria being *diarchical*, with a military Head of State presiding over a country with democratically constituted national and state assemblies. Even though some notable Nigerians such as Azikiwe (1984) proposed the diarchy Thesis as the panacea for a stable and non-military incursion into the body polity of the nation, the transitional programme did not make any provision for such. It was evident that the emerging diarchic administrative arrangement was either as a result of insincerity on the part of the ruling military government to disengage from politics or as a result of faulty transition arrangement *ab-initio*. On June 12, 1993 the long awaited presidential election took place using the modified open ballot system. The outcome of the voting showed that the SDP flagbearer (Chief M.K.O. Abiola) victory over the NRC's Ibrahim Tofa, was unprecedentedly national in scope. It is worthy of note that the election was characterized by a new pattern of voting which was peaceful and orderly conducted in the history of Nigeria's general elections. In spite of these clear indications of transition to civilian rule, the whole process was forestalled by allegations, counter allegations, court actions and ultimately an annulment. According to Akintinwa, (1997), an imbroglio was created following the annulment of the June 12 election, but this imbroglio did not result directly from the annulled election nor from any religious or ethnic bigotry, but mainly from North-South considerations and "*Babangidocracy*."<sup>6</sup> Ironically, the annulment of June 12 presidential election did not mark the end of transition to civil rule, rather it was the beginning of the third republic and installation of non-democratically elected president and head of Interim National Government (ING).

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<sup>6</sup> The *Babangidocracy* in this case implies the Babangida factor. The Babangidocracy could be linked up, indirectly with the National Institutes Alumni Association's option II to the Buhari administration in 1984. the option II prescribes power sharing between military and politicians, with military holding the veto power (Olagunju et al, 1993:95).



Following series of events after the annulment of June 12 elections, the third republic was initiated, which saw a stage managed succession from military to undemocratically elected civilian administration. Even though the stepping aside of General Babangida as president and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces seem to have signaled the final disengagement of the military from government as Chief Ernest Shonekan believed (Newswatch, 1993: 15), the ING remained dependent on the military because it lacked independent popular mandate. Prophetically, on Nov. 17th 1993 following inconclusive government talks with the striking labour federation, and pressures from the military hierarchy, Chief Shonekan relinquished his position as Head of the ING and C-in-C and was replaced by General Sani Abacha, his deputy and “watchdog”.

#### **4.4 The brutal Journey to the Fourth Republic**

Abacha’s regime however marked the end of the shortest lived “quasi civilian” government and third republic of Nigeria. The regime saw to the re-composition of a military rule, the scrapping of all democratic institutions, and the replacement of the ING by a Provisional Ruling Council, (PRC) and Federal Executive Council (FEC). Abacha’s initial declared agenda was ominously reticent about a timetable for the military’s political disengagement in politics. He set up the machinery for a promised constitutional conference, which was a gesture to capture the long standing demand of pro-democracy groups call for a National Conference. Establishment of a new transition by him was predictably disappointing to those who had expected him to install Chief MKO Abiola as the President of the country. Gen. Abacha’s attempts to generate public support for his coup could hardly eclipse the pervasive feeling of despair over the collapse of a transition project that had gulped an estimated N30 billion (Suberu, 1997), and some of the enraged third Republic Senators viewed him as masking under excuses. There were uncertified allegations that the then military head of state sole financed the registered political parties (NCPN, GDM, DPN, etc.) for a self-succession bid. There were traces of “fake transition” beginning from “transition without end “(Diamond, *et al* 1997). In cognizance of the intentions of General Abacha, Rtd. Gen. Yar Adua and Gen. Obasanjo found themselves crisscrossing the country and mobilizing for one political project or another, either against Abacha’s self-succession scheme, or continuing with their shadow-boxing in preparation for a political race about to be declared open (Adekanye, 1999; 192). After the tortious years of Abacha’s transition, his death marked the end of his

bold self-succession attempts at retuning Nigeria to democratically elected civilian government.

Until June 1998, when General Abdulsalam Abubakar became Nigeria's new head of state following Gen. Abacha's death, the progress in the transition programme from military to civilian rule had been about one scheme in self-succession or the other. Unlike the previous regime, Gen. Ababakar's transition plan that lasted shorter than two years, consolidated and sharpened up the way towards democratic transition in Nigeria. Gen. Abubakar proved to be honest and determined to relinquish power to the democratically elected civilians, which was initially doubtful to many Nigerians. Ultimately, on Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> 1999, he was proven to be truthful in keeping to his mandate, irrespective of all odds by holding a presidential election without controversy. This momentous and bold step of Gen. Abubakar signaled the positive end of his military regime and the beginning of the fourth republic on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1999.

## **5. THE “SAINT” AND “DEVIL” IN THE MILITARY TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC SUCCESSION AND CIVIL RULE IN NIGERIA**

From the retrospective trace of the role the military played in the political succession in Nigeria since the first republic to the “third republic”, the viable conclusion that could be reached is that the military institution play both positive and negative roles in shaping the political landscape of Nigeria. Similar notions and substantiations have been made on other strategic and enforcement organs of state such as the police in elections (Roberts and Obioha 2005) and in a fledgling democracy (Slingsers and Obioha, 2015). Notwithstanding the magnitude and enduring negative roles in destabilizing inaugurated democratic governments or disrupting military – civilian transition, their positive roles in opposing long military rule and self-military succession could not be taken for granted. Precisely, the role of the military during the first republic could be seen by many political and social analysts as essentially disruptive of a fledging first independent government in 1964, they might have their merits in staging the 1966 coup, among which as the role payers (plotters) claimed is to cleanse up Nigerian society of corrupt, tribalistic and nepotic government, even though the democracy was still on trial and would have been supported and encouraged to develop. The interruption and disruption of democracy by the military was not restricted to their overthrow of civilian regime, but extended to disruption of military governments. Transition from military to civilian government programmes under the military

was unsettled by fellow military officers through coups in 1966, 1975 and 1985, even to some extent in 1993. Unfortunately the military regimes that toppled their predecessors were also toppled by another, who also advanced the same reasons, in what seemed like a perpetual cycle of military domination and cling to power.

Second, and third republic democratic succession experiments were also grounded by the military. While they halted the civilian handover in the former, they could not let the third republic be constitutionally composed as it was supposed to be. The military was then afraid and refused to relinquish power to a democratically elected civilian government as observed in the political attitudes and behaviours of the then military heads of states, Gen. Babangida and Gen. Abacha. In these two cases, one striking similar feature was the element of maneuvering for self-succession. However, they differ in many other things such as the tactics and boldness, in which case Gen Babangida was quite tactful and scheme oriented as he was fondly called “Maradona” due to his political dribbling know-how, while Gen Abacha was simply one with brute force. During the regimes of the “dou” the military brass was substantively behind them and acted as their constituency and sources of support and inspiration. The Military organization as a whole or a class perceived the civilians as incapable of forming a viable government, while individual members see the civilian population as political opponents. From all indication, this situation lasted long, but partially came to an end during Gen. Abubakar’s short stay in office when the two camps were joined and reconciled. This period marked the beginning of willful *politiking* by the retired military brass in Nigeria.

Irrespective of the destabilizing functions of the military institution in political transition and succession to democracy as pointed out above, the institution’s individual members, especially retired officers have contributed to a large extent towards actualization of democratic succession in Nigeria. The role of Mohammed /Obasanjo, and Obasanjo/Yar Adua regimes in democratic succession cannot be under-estimated. Besides, the role of the military as an institution and its members including the head of state and other individuals in political /democratic succession during Gen. Abubakar’s regime in 1999 is worthy of commendation. A succinct review of the scenario indicated that the success of Gen. Abubakar’s transition to civil rule in 1999 owed partly to his administration’s parley with the retired army Generals, ex-military and police chiefs among others, whom he hosted and briefed during his government (The Guardian, 1998: 4). Adekanye (1999) pointed out that a number of the military

class also stood up to declare their stand, especially those who were retired by the previous government due to their tacit support for the quest for democratic governance in Nigeria. It was discovered that a number of the retired military officers also joined some of the pro-democracy groups such as National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) in pursuit of the cause. Also in the struggle against Abacha's self-succession and quest for enthronement of civilian democratic rule, some top military officers found themselves earmarked for physical elimination by agents of Gen. Abacha's regime. This claim was validated during the various open hearing and expositions in the Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission (fondly called Oputa Panel). These among others laid background for eventual enthronement of civilian democratic rule in (1999) fourth republic.

## **6. MILITARY IN DEMOCRATIC SUCCESSION AND STABILITY IN NIGERIA FOURTH REPUBLIC AND BEYOND**

Observation has shown that the way towards the success of democracy is the citizens' sense of political efficacy of elections and implicit belief in their ability to effect the political change through the constitutional means or process. This aspiration was made true on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1999 when the fourth republic civilian President of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in as the President of Nigeria Federation. The Nigeria public welcomed the development, although with some sense of criticisms. However, what becomes the role of the military institution in this fourth republic is a major issue of concern. To what extent the military personnel were involved and subordinated to Obasanjo administration and beyond is another question? Are they loyal to the present administration?

Given the background of these questions, negative responses point to some problems, while positive outcome entails progress and stability in the polity. The feelings of top military personnel have been in accordance with what is expected of them. They have been loyal, involved, and subordinated to the democratically elected civilian administrations from the fourth republic to the present administration. One may think that their support for the Obasanjo administration from 1999 – 2007 could be because the elected President, retired Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo was one of them, who still gained and retained the privileges of the long tradition of *esprit – de – corp*. 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.” The tacit support of the Obasanjo administration by the retired Generals could not be underestimated, and that of the serving personnel in the army, better imagined. This ample support appeared to have evaporated during the Yara Adua/Jonathan regime and Goodluck Jonathan/Sambo administration. For instance, one of the difficulties that President Jonathan had with fighting Boko Haram insurgency was apparently lack of *esprit-de-cop* from the Military, which led to allegations of sabotage. On the other hand, the assumption of office as the President of Federal Republic of Nigeria by retired Gen. Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 somewhat brought back the military rigor in the fight against Boko Haram, which obviously points to the loyalty of serving military commanders to their retired colleague. Most political analysts believe that the quest to crush Boko Haram insurgency was one of the vote catchers for President Muhammadu Buhari.

Previously, President Obasanjo had in several occasions acknowledged the military’s support and loyalty to his administration (Onuora, 2000). The military institution also believes to have tacitly pledged their support for the realization of the fourth republic, through their cardinal instrument of professionalism. According to Gen Victor Malu, (then Chief of Army Staff Fourth Republic) at the dawn of the swearing in ceremony and beginning of the fourth republic, “our unfortunate drifting into politics has strained military-civilian relationship. The new democratic dispensation however provides a healthy environment for the development of all citizens” (The Guardian, 2000: 19). The General believed that the army has taken its rightful place in the new era, and should be seen as the facilitators of a secure and peaceful atmosphere, which could encourage the growth of the nascent democracy. This view point of the Chief of Army Staff influenced reorganization of the Nigerian Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) from military based to democratic structures. The Institute started a gradual demilitarization in line with the present democratic dispensation. As part of the demilitarization exercise, military designations had been replaced with civil appellation at the institute. Besides, some key officers of the institute are now, moderators, while syndicate is replaced with integrated research group (Punch, 2000: 5). The institutional modifications showed how serious and positive the military was towards the success of the present Nigeria’s fourth republic.

urthermore, the reality of the feelings of the military personnel during the Obasanjo administration, their disconnection during Goodluck Jonathan and a

reconnection in the present Nigeria government under President Buhari may not be unconnected with the extent of the involvement of the retired generals and other army officers in the politics of the fourth republic. Although, one is not discarding the fact that quite a number of retired Military personnel were part of Goodluck Jonathan administration. In the first place, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo created a dilute in the pressure for scramble for power between the military and civilian political groups. Secondly, he banked on the tacit support of the retired military generals in restoring democratic governance to Nigeria by appointing them in strategic portfolios in his cabinet (E.g. Defence Minister, Minister of Police Affairs etc.). This has also been repeated by President Buhari who appointed retired military Generals as Ministers (retired Gen. Danbazu of Internal Affairs as an example among others) in his current government in Nigeria.

Observation of the polity shows that the ex-military officers participated favourably in the democratic transition, and later formed substantial part of the fourth republic government (executive and legislature), except the judiciary. “The 1999 transition threw up its first ex-military officer turned quasi-civilian as the governor of Kwara State (retired Rear Admiral Mohammed Lawal). Election results of the national and state House of assemblies produced retired Generals Ike Nwachukwu, Tunde Ogbeha, David Mark, Nuhu Aliyu, Brimo Yusuf among others as legislators” (Adekanye, 1999) under various parties’ platform. This trend has continued beyond 1999 where Olagunsoye Oyinlola among others held gubernatorial positions and up to the present dispensation where several retired Generals have been elected as either national/state legislators or executive governors in the federated states. More ex-military officers are joining politics and contesting both elective and party positions. Available information (Table 1) substantiates the activities of the military in Nigeria body politics. The country has witnessed ruler ship of more head of state with military than civilian background. This points to the grooming and preparedness of military personnel in politics. From 1999 to the present, two out of four elected presidents of Federal Republic of Nigeria are from the military background, while two are civilians. More interestingly, combined, the two Presidents with military background governed for longer years than those with civilian background. This further indicates the deep rooted nature of ex-military personnel in politics, which has a very long future implication on sustainability of democracy in Nigeria.

With the involvement and investment of both financial and time resources by the retired generals in the democratization process, there is a strong assumption that

this crop of individuals would obviously strive to protect and preserve the quest for democracy in Nigeria. This bothers on the fact that if for nothing else, but because of their personal interest and material investment, even though the retired Generals are accused of simply intimidating their political opponents with corrupt funds they looted from government when they were active in military service. Given this background, attempts by serving military officers in organizing coup is logically dangerous and tantamount to failure because they may not receive the financial and moral blessings of the retired Generals, who have focused their energy and resources in politics.

**Table 1: Past and Present Nigeria Head of State (1963 Republican Status to the Present) and their background**

Name	Term/Reign	Office	Background
Nnamdi Azikiwe	1963 - 1966	President	+++
Yakubu Gowon	1966–1975	Military ruler	**
Murtala Mohammed	1975 - 1976	Military ruler	**
Olusegun Obasanjo	1976–1979	Military ruler	**
Shehu Shagari	1979–1983	Civilian President	+++
Muhammed Buhari	1983 - 1985	Military ruler	**
Ibrahim Babangida	1985–1993	Military ruler	**
Ernest Shonekan	1993 - 1993	Civilian President	+++
Sani Abacha	1993 - 1998	Military ruler	**
Abdulsalami Abubakar	1998–1999	Military ruler	**
Olusegun Obasanjo	1999 - 2007	Civilian President	**
Umaru Musa Yaradua	2007 - 2010	Civilian President	+++
Goodluck Jonathan	2010–2015	Civilian President	+++
Muhammed Buhari	2015 - Present	Civilian President	**

Note \*\* military background: +++ civilian background

Hypothetically speaking, the funds that the ex-Generals may consider for use in financing military coups, if they are interested are now channeled towards struggle for democratic power and influence.

Besides, in terms of skills, because of the positioning of retired Generals in various democratic governments from the fourth republic 1999 and beyond, up to the present administration under retired Gen. Buhari there is apparently more security in stabilizing and sustaining Nigeria democracy to maturation. The presence of the above recounted background in the Nigerian politics from 1999 to the present (2016) gives much credence to sustainable support the military has provided Nigeria polity. If for no other reason, when the current wave of support

is harvested, secured, and sustained it would go a long way in entrenching sustainable democratic governance that could be devoid of the suspicion of military coup.

## 7. CONCLUSION REMARKS

This paper examined the military as an institution and its role in political succession in Nigeria. The analysis of the information gathered attests to the fact that the military had played the role of both distractive and sustaining force in Nigeria's democratization project. This stems from the observation that the military could have allowed the fledgling democracies at various times and stages to evolve and mature, instead of staging coup d'état. The incidences of 1966 and 1983 point to the above, where the military believed that they could sanitize the polity and restore democracy but later failed to deliver the goods. Contrarily, the military has presented itself and acted in some occasions as the custodian of democratic principles by initiating and implementing them. However, history proved that these democratic principles and arrangements put in place by the military are usually faulty and inadequate for a variable democratic governance to thrive on. The military has also contributed both as an institution and collective of individuals in sustaining democratic project of Nigeria since 1999 to the present. This claim has been substantiated by ample evidence of involvement and investments by retired Military Generals in democratic governance in Nigeria. Their commitment, inclusion and absorption into politics after their retirement from the armed forces and their desire to continue in the part of democratic career attests to this claim.

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