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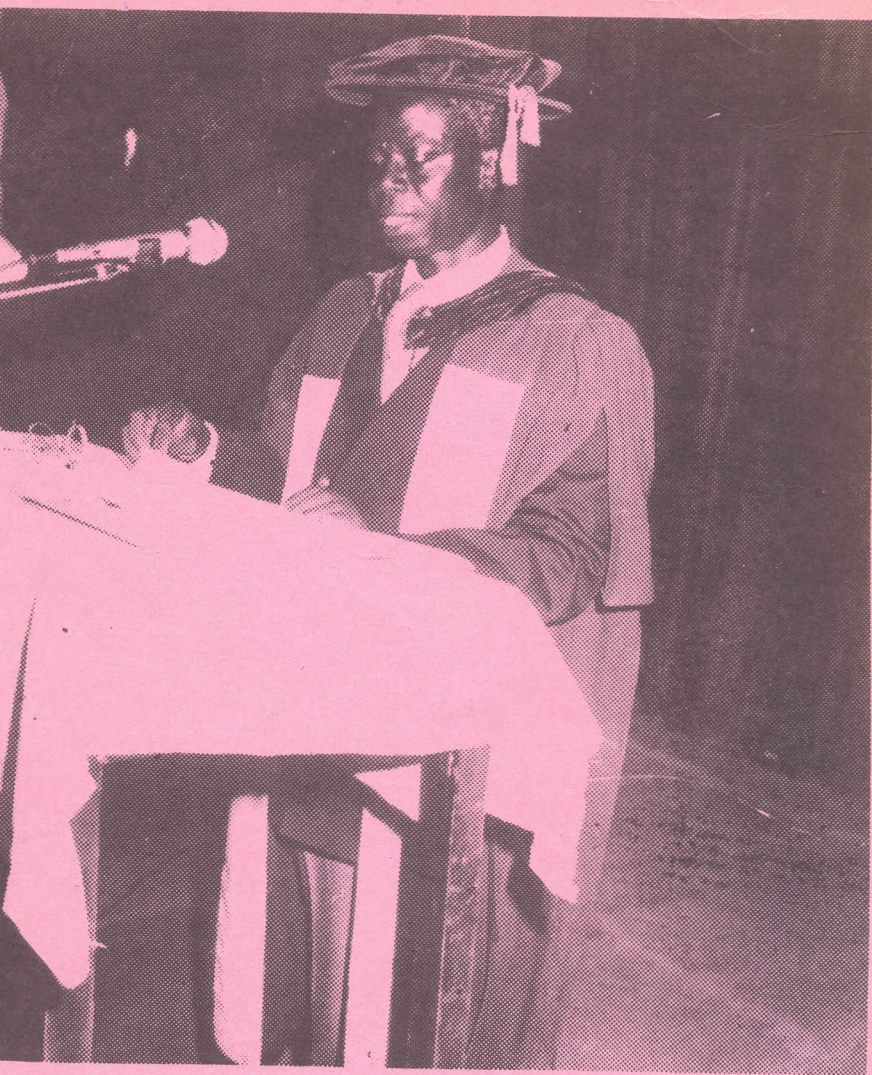
Inaugural Lecture Series 94

**THE PRAETORIAN TRADITION
THE PROBLEMS AND
PROSPECTS OF MILITARY
DISENGAGEMENT**

By L. O. Dare

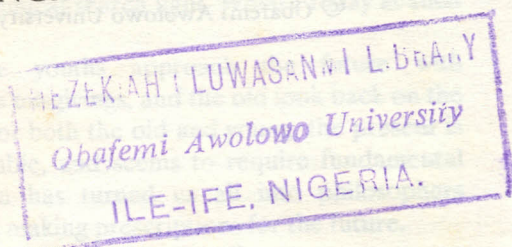


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THE PRAETORIAN TRAP: THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF MILITARY DISENGAGEMENT



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Introduction

In moments of crises, men seek salvation in philosophising. In such moments when basic assumptions about man's future cannot be taken for granted the goals and future of the political realm are placed under man's philosophical search light. We are today at such crisis point.

Today in Nigeria, the youths approach the future with apprehension and justifiable misgivings, and the old look back on the past with some nostalgia. For both the old and young, the present is undesirable and unpredictable, and seems to require fundamental modification. The situation has turned us all into philosophers questioning the present and making prescriptions for the future.

In this collective effort there seems some rudimentary agreement derived essentially from historical information. Those information are that Nigeria has spent 19 of her 29 years of political independence under military rule, and secondly that military rule as far as the quality of life of the ordinary citizen goes, has not been a success story.

Since 19 years of military rule has ended in this undesirable situation, the logic of the argument goes further; if we end both present military rule and future military intervention, we may soon be on the way to establishing a more desirable future. In short, there seems an agreement that military rule is bad. It is not only the "Ivory Tower extremists" who share this view. It is equally pervasive among the military. For example, on October 5 1988, General Babangida was quoted as saying:

All things being equal, I would wish that my administration was the last military regime to come to power in the country . . . The machinery to render coups an impossible task in the nation's future polity was being put in place through various political awareness and enlightenment activities such as MAMSER already enshrined in the transition programme (*National Concord* October 5, 1988).

An understandable hope for someone in his position. If I were in the President's position, I would not want coups either. Since there was no subsequent denial, and no journalist was arrested or detained

for that publication, we can safely assume that Mr. President was correctly reported.

It is indeed a challenge writing on a topic on which everybody has an opinion, and yet, there seems to be no right answer. Whether aware of it or not, each commentator speculates from an ideological frame of reference and to that extent, each view can be said to be biased. It is in realization of this that I, with deep humility present in this lecture a synthesis of my views on one of the perennial issues of our time, the problems and prospects of military disengagement.

The Role of the Military in the Political Process

In our introductory lesson on politics, we learnt that the military profession is composed of men and materials whose role is to organize, control and apply force in pursuit of policies determined by the state. According to this introductory lesson, the military is seen to acquiesce in its subservient position, and also to develop an a-political posture which incorporates the objective of absolute civilian control and supremacy.

We have since realized the limitations of this first lesson. Historical evidence shows that the introductory lesson was an idealistic formulation. Certainly, by its nature, the military is a political force, and the military apparatus is part of state power and does participate in policy formulation particularly on security matters. Top military men have always been consulted by civilian politicians when necessary. Similarly, changes in technology and the art of war have forced significant changes in the relationship between the military and civilian organizations. The foreign policies of states and national security are closely worked out in consultation with the military. Military men now study the social and political as well as the military dimensions of war and peace.

However, active intervention of the military in politics and actual seizure of power by armed men which is the definition of praetorianism is still in principle regarded as an exception rather than the rule, as a departure from normalcy, and as a situation to be tolerated only under extenuating circumstances.

The Military in African Politics

The late 1950's to the middle of the sixties was comparatively a period of hope in the probability that the institutions which the departing colonial administrations hastily set up in their erstwhile

colonies would evolve into democratic forms similar to those in the metropolitan countries. The newly independent states it was hoped, would evolve into Western type democracies.

For their part, the new states busied themselves with setting up such apparatus of statehood as the legislature, the executive and judicial bodies; the civil service, police, the military as well as other agencies for external relations. Western academics lent credence to this hope in their choice of words. These new states were variously described as developing countries, modernizing democracies, emergent nations and so on. And for the departing colonial masters, such as Britain, they heartily congratulated themselves on having successfully transplanted democracies into the colonial soils. It was then asserted that due to the spadework that had been done by the colonial masters, Africa was unlikely to go the way of Latin America in terms of government by Sabre wielding men on horseback.

These high hopes did not last long. We have since discovered that most of these countries are not developing or emerging into anything recognizable but have become fertile grounds for the activities of the dreaded men on horseback.

PERIOD WITHIN WHICH INDEPENDENT AFRICAN REGIMES WERE DEPOSED BY THEIR MILITARY

1-5 YEARS	6-10 YEARS	OVER 10 YEARS
Algeria	Congo Brazz.	Chad
Boswana	Gabor	Gambia
Burundi	Ghana	
Central African Republic	Mali	Guinea
	Niger	Ethiopia
Zaire	Nigeria	Tunisia
Dahomey (Benin Rep.)	S. Leone	Mauritania
Libya	Uganda	Sudan
Rwanda	Upper Volta (B. Faso)	
Togo		
United Arab Emirates		
10	9	7

During the period up to 1978, 42 African states had obtained political independence. Out of these, 10 regimes were toppled by their militaries within the first five years of independence, 9 others within six to ten years and in another 7 countries it took a little over ten years before their soldiers discovered what their colleagues elsewhere were doing and they mobilized in that direction. Today, of the over fifty African states, only ten countries — the Cameroon, Angola, Mozambique, Malawi and Tunisia, Senegal, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Zimbabwe — have not been directly threatened by their armed forces. This is a small minority.

It is one thing to experience a coup, which is a manifestation of praetorianism, but which may be accidental or unpatterned, but a different thing to be caught in the praetorian trap. The praetorian trap is when a political system is unable to free its administration from the stranglehold of its armed forces.

Our research indicates that for most countries, the first coup is the longest in coming. After the first, subsequent governmental displacements come in quick succession. We have therefore decided to classify a country as having been caught in the praetorian trap if:

- (a) It has experienced up to three coups, and
- (b) It has experienced seven or more uninterrupted years of military government.

The need for a third coup can be explained by the fact that the second coup may merely undo the damage of the first and return power to civilians. When the third coup takes place, the praetorian pattern becomes established. Similarly, seven years is longer than the life of an elected regime, so that a military regime that stays that long no longer qualifies to be called a corrective regime.

In applying these two conditions, we can say that 41 African states have experienced coups, but that 28 of them are caught in the praetorian trap.

These are:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Algeria | 15. Uganda |
| 2. Burundi | 16. Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) |
| 3. Central African Rep., | 17. Zaire |
| 4. Chad | 18. Mali |
| 5. Congo Brazzaville | 19. Sudan |
| 6. Zaire | 20. Somalia |
| 7. Dahomey (Benin Rep.) | 21. Madagascar |
| 8. Ethiopia | 22. Rwanda |
| 9. Gabon | 23. Niger |
| 10. Ghana | 24. Seychelles |
| 11. Liberia | 25. Comoros |
| 12. Libya | 26. Equitorial Guinea |
| 13. Nigeria | 27. Mauritania |
| 14. Togo | 28. Guinea Bissau. |

There are countries like Guinea (1984) and Lesotho (1986) which have experienced military intervention in recent times but in which the pattern is too early to be determined.

Competing Explanations of Military Involvement

From the sixties to the present, three competing explanations have emerged. These are the military characteristics factors which Janowitz proposed, societal disorganization credited to Samuel Huntington and the dependency theory by contemporary socialists.

The Military Characteristics Factors

Morris Janowitz (1964) led the school of thought which initially attempted to explain military intervention on the basis of the fact that the military organization possesses some qualities which facilitate their political involvement. The capacity to intervene is said to derive from distinctive military format, namely "its control of the instruments of violence; its ethos of public service national identification, its skill structure which combines managerial ability

with heroic posture" and finally its "internal cohesion."

Evidence from the military in the new states show that these are projected qualities derived from idealized models. While the military organizations in new states may possess some monopoly of the weapons of violence, they may not necessarily follow up with the other attributes such as public service, nationalism, unity of command and internal cohesion. The factors responsible for the lack of cohesion in most of the military units of the new states have been clearly shown in Cynthia Enloe's book titled *Ethnic Soldiers: state security in divided Societies* (1981). In this book, Enloe showed convincingly that military cohesion is eroded by factors such as ethnicity, language, religion, education, intergenerational conflicts among officers, conflict based on the institutions where such officers trained, conflict among the different arms of the armed forces — i.e. Army, Navy and the Air force, and so on.

Furthermore, internal cohesion and esprit de corps are usually eroded where some units have planned coups, inheriting power and its privileges to the exclusion of other units. All these factors distort the assumed organizational purity of the military, so that we cannot always expect them to act in unison.

Societal Disorganisation

Samuel Huntington (1968) led a competing school of thought stating that the nature and causes of military involvement in new states go beyond the characteristics of the military. He sees military intervention as one manifestation of societal disorientation, and politicization (p. 194). In his words:

Military explanations do not explain military intervention. Military interventions are one specific manifestation of a broader phenomenon in underdeveloped societies: the general politicization of social forces and institutions . . . All sorts of social forces and groups become directly engaged in general politics. Countries which have political armies also have political clergies, political universities, political bureaucracies, political labour unions and political corporations. Society as a whole is out-of-joint, not just the military.

Huntington continued (p. 196)

In all societies, specialized social groups engage in politics. What makes such groups seem more "politicized" in a praetorian society is the absence of effective political institutions capable of mediating, refining and moderating group political action. In a praetorian system, social forces confront each other nakedly; no political institutions, no corps of professional political leaders are recognized or accepted as the legitimate intermediaries to moderate group conflict... Equally important, no agreement exists among the groups as to the legitimate and authoritative methods for resolving conflict.

In a praetorian society, however, not only are the actors varied, but so also are the methods used to decide upon office and policy. Each group employs means which reflect its peculiar nature and capabilities. The wealthy bribe, students riot, workers strike, mobs demonstrate and the military coup... The techniques of military intervention are simply more dramatic and effective than the others because, as Hobbes put it, "When nothing else is turned up, clubs are trumps."

This lack of effective authority produces what Zolberg might term "Power deflation" or what I elsewhere called the inflation of the market value of coercion. Since force rules, the possession of weapons confers rulership. The military forces possessing weapons can then seize, or capture or sometimes in the words of Kerekou, "gather power"

In dealing with the same topic, of societal disorientation, Fred Riggs in his *Administration in Developing Countries*, equated the new nations with the Prismatic model as opposed to the diffracted models of the more developed polities. Using the analogy of the market, Riggs asserted: (p. 105).

The Prismatic economic scene resembles a market being set apart for the sale of goods and services in terms of money, but its dynamics of exchange reflect strong influences from social, political, prestigious and religious considerations as well as purely economic factors.

In this Prismatic model Riggs went on,

“The older customs — the folkways and mores which once fully regulated social and secular behaviour — become decadent survivals clung to, only by the older generation, the reactionaries, the arch-conservatives or the ancient minded. The novel laws, regulations and ethical standards borrowed from abroad cannot be activated. Administrative resources for their enforcement by the government are lacking, and they are not sufficiently rooted in popular understanding and support to win voluntary compliance. To squat, smuggle, bribe, cheat — indeed to take what one can, to save oneself and the devil take the hindmost” — become the prevalent rule.

Society as a whole becomes poly-normative or normless, and there is a substantial divorce between theory and practice, between the law and its implementation, between authority and control. This results in formalism.

As there are no agreements about goals, there can hardly be any on the means. When there are no agreements about the nature of who should have the right to rule, then control is grasped by coercion, by violence, by money, charisma, but not by legitimate authority originating from popular wishes.

Disjointed Society/Disjointed Army

Most of the new states have been aptly described as “Nations by Design” in the sense that their political boundaries evolved under the irrationality of colonialism. Being multi-ethnic or plural societies, their primordial attachments to ethnicity is far stronger than to the new national entity. Ethnic relations are disjointed and the need for collective wellbeing appears over-shadowed by ethnic particularism. Societal decentralization manifests itself in all other institutions of the political system.

Politics becomes the act of bargaining of accommodation and of coalition forming. David Apter called such systems reconciliatory in view of the fact that divisions and cleavages find their expression in the constitutional arrangement which of necessity becomes slow and immobile.

The military organization in such societies is also affected by the societal decentralization in three specific ways:

- (a) it becomes difficult to create a united army just as it is difficult to create unity in other subsystems. Ethnicity becomes a crucial variable in recruitment and promotion in such armed forces and merit and performance are relegated.
- (b) societal divisions filter into the armed forces in other ways in that military rebellion, insurrection and coups follow ethnic lines. In pursuit of sectional interests as opposed to corporate ones cliques motivated by ethnopolitical considerations may topple the government and take over the state machinery to pursue such sectional goals.
- (c) finally, the cleavages in the society make the military readily maleable to would be external adventurers. Where divisions exist, these can be accentuated, and where none is visible, they can easily be created and made real.

These features tend to erode discipline and internal cohesion of the military. It was this that led Zolberg (1968) to describe the typical contemporary sub-saharan African Army as "far from being a model of hierarchical organization" but rather as "an assemblage of armed men who may or may not obey their officers."

The Unruly Political Class

The political class does not follow the laws of the land either. Elections are manipulated and political power is used rather arbitrarily. Political opponents are prosecuted while government functionaries act as if they are above the law. From time to time, politicians call on both the military and police to quell rebellions or challenges to their authority or to intimidate real or potential opposition. This disposition which frequently draws the armed forces into domestic politics makes them aware of the vulnerability of the politicians. The armed forces become aware that without them the incumbent class would succumb to other civilian groups. The temptation for the officers to intervene becomes virtually irresistible and when they do, resistance from civilian organizations are

non-existent. Thus military seizure of power is an ever present temptation that may open all types of opportunities both political and economic to those involved.

In short, Huntington would rather not blame soldiers for their intervention but view it as a reflection of overall malaise prevalent in societies with underdeveloped political cultures.

The Praetorian Universities

The main feature of the universities in praetorian settings is the impact of non-academic factors on the operations of the systems. In those institutions, normlessness or formalism prevails. Procedures and rules are circumvented with reckless abandon. For example student admissions are sometimes based on non-academic criteria. Selection and promotion of staff are distorted. The academic adventurer who may have no proven leadership qualities gets appointed. Even while operating at his personal best, it is soon discovered he has pulled the institution down to his level of mediocrity. Unable to relate to the more competent, or feeling uneasy among them, the academic adventurer's watch-word seems to be loyalty rather than excellence. The more competent and devoted academics are thus forced to seek fulfilment and recognition outside the universities. Eventually the tower caves in and the ivory tarnishes.

The staff of the praetorian universities, being products of the disjointed society, are unable to set independent standards of behaviour for their community. They seem to evaluate themselves with the same yardsticks as their less educated folks outside. They seem to play-act university systems.

We have gone to this length to illustrate the point made earlier that all aspects of life in the praetorian society contribute to the general disorientation. An examination of the politics of the labour unions or religious politics will similarly highlight the same disorientation. These are the diseases that must be treated in any effort to combat praetorianism.

The Dependency Theory

A third explanation which has gained grounds with Marxist-Leninists is the dependency theory. There had earlier been a conspiracy in Western Literature not to discuss the dependent

nature of the new states vis-a-vis the more developed ones. It is a known fact that the borders of the new states are pathologically porous, and their economies subject to external interference and manipulation. The new states which are predominantly producers of raw materials lack the technological base to process those raw materials. They are therefore forced to depend on the industrialized nations to finish the manufacturing of the products which are in turn sold to the original producers of the raw materials at high prices.

This dependency is heightened by the fact that all new states want to maintain the structural apparatus of statehood, including a conventional army, Navy or Air force. Since few of these states produce the arms and ammunition, the planes, frigates destroyers, tanks and submarines, they have to purchase these. The irony of the situation is that these purchases do not enhance the security of these political systems. If anything, they further tie these nations to the whims of the arms manufacturers who may decide, without prior consultation, to change models thus forcing the old models to become unserviceable. The consumers have to purchase new ones. We can thus see that the strongest chain binding the new states to the developed ones is the military apparatus. Yet, any civilian regime that tries to break this chain is manoeuvred out of power with the connivance of the foreign paymasters. When Marxist scholars attempt to explain the prevalence of military regimes as a manifestation of both economic and military dependence on the industrialized states, a strong point is being made. Most military regimes have only succeeded in tying the economies of their respective states to the apron-strings of the arms manufacturers and they explain this as the "modernization of defence". We assert that such modernization of defence in most cases, have not rendered the defence forces more efficient in terms of prosecuting wars. They have only been more efficient in terms of repression of the unarmed civilian populations.

The Demand for Disengagement

The proceedings seem to suggest an element of inevitability in the involvement of the military in politics. This would on the face value suggest the acceptance of military rule, and all that would be left would be for the military to find ways of legitimizing itself. Nothing

could be farther from the truth. Despite the frequency of military governments, the military have not found ways of **gaining mass acceptance**. In fact, countries that have experienced **frequent military takeover** have become less tolerant of military rule.

If the deposed civilian administration had performed poorly, the initial acceptance of the military may be high but this may not detract from the pervasive feeling that military rule is illegitimate, acceptable only as a corrective step, after which civilian rule must be restored. For this reason, all military regimes come under pressure to justify their existence and prove that they are purposeful in government. The period during which military rule is tolerated, which we call the honeymoon with the public is generally short, lasting no longer than from six months to a year. After this period, questions are asked about the purpose of the regime and to what extent it has fulfilled the initial promises. The failure of the military may shorten this honeymoon and lead to early call for disengagement. Such calls come essentially from those who might not have benefitted from the regime — academics, some clerics, labour, and of course, the politicians, but rarely from the civil service or, traditional rulers. In addition to these domestic pressure groups, external forces who style themselves “defenders of democracy” may also urge the regime to set in motion the process of democratization.

In that situation, the military regime has limited options which include:

- (a) Taking measures to suppress all forms of opposition either through draconian decrees or police operations, or secondly,
- (b) Seeking legitimacy through policies, and,
- (c) Disengaging or promising to do so.

Repression is a double-edged sword which has self-destroying propensities. Coercion makes a regime very unpopular and aggravates its illegitimacy until the regime itself is destroyed by its agents. In any case, few of the new states have the infrastructure to adequately control in a totalitarian fashion. What they end up doing is acting arbitrarily, and becoming a source of annoyance to everyone including some of their supporters.

The second option which is seeking legitimacy through policies is itself bedevilled by the lack of resources. The easiest way out for most military regimes is to promise to disengage or to transform the military regime to a form of civilian administration.

There are several forms of this transformation. These range from personalist transformation (Zaire 1970, Togo 1967 Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) 1970) to many mutations of orderly transition. It could be transition after a long period of military rule (Mexico) or may be a hasty and disorderly departure as was the case in the Sudan in 1964, S. Leone (1968).

It is ironic that a realistic promise to disengage improves the legitimacy of the military. In layman's language, when the military regime promises to commit political suicide by disengaging, its legitimacy rating improves. The decision not to go similarly erodes the standing of a military regime. Either option is thus problematic. We now turn to examine the problems associated with the decision to go.

(a) *The Problem of Credibility*

Claude Welch (1970) observed that "it is notoriously easier for the armed forces to seize control than to give it up." He went further that "second thoughts and procrastinations about handing over to civilians thus become common phenomena in the history of military dominated governments." These observations are as valid today as they were in 1970 when they were first made. In this section, we shall look at the fact that since promises to disengage are most often not honoured, such pronouncements no longer generate any excitement. Instead, a "wait and see" attitude is adopted, to see if supportive actions will follow the verbal pledge.

Yet for the sincere military regime, it wants to be believed, to have some credibility, and at the same time, to have some tactical freedom to manoeuvre. This creates for the regime, an initial problem as to how to present a disengagement programme that can be acceptable to the public, and within which it can retain the political freedom and flexibility to adjust the programme as events unfold.

We need to note that for a disengagement programme to be credible, it must possess certain qualities. It must be time specific, explaining how and when certain activities will be concluded. Such a

period must in itself be "reasonably short". What the military regards as reasonably short may not be what it seems to the people. But in order to justify what is reasonably short, the military must state the quantity of work to be accomplished. However, we feel that a reasonably short period should not be longer than the life span of an elected civilian administration.

In view of this observation, Dare hypothesized (1987), if a military regime proposes a disengagement programme longer than this conventionally reasonable period, the onus for justification is on the regime, and failure to provide such a convincing justification for the extra time poses a danger to the legitimacy of the regime.

(b) *Competing Interests/Competing Songs*

Interest group theorists view politics as the interaction and interplay of influence among various groups in the political system. This holds for both civilian and military administrations. Therefore, policy outcomes are the result of the competing pressures by the various groups and interests. These put pressures on the centres of decision-making and on the political actors. The policy of the military to disengage is dependent on pressures from various groups within and outside the society. Just as there are groups which favour disengagement, there are also others who may wish the military to continue. The first group we shall refer to as the pro-disengagement group. Each group may incorporate people from civilian and military personnel, business interests both foreign and domestic, and so on. What is important to note is that each group attempts to influence government and the decision of government represents the relative weight of the groups. For example, those interests which benefit most from military rule i.e. civil servants, traditional rulers, business and commercial interests, military personnel in political position, usually support a continuation of military rule. Lined against these are those groups who view military rule as eroding their power and authority, and those who feel the present dispensation has not been as beneficial to them as they had hoped. These may include military personnel, civilian politicians and others who have same axes to grind with the military regime.

Among the military, disaffection with military rule stems from various causes. Some military men, even though benefitting from

military rule, may for corporate and professional reasons wish a return to the barracks. Such officers may feel that political involvement corrupts the military and they try to prevent further corruption of their profession by pressing for disengagement. Others can be dissatisfied with the present regime simply because they feel relegated in the distribution of political patronage. If and when they are drawn into the administration, they will change their stance.

Whatever the situation, what is important for us to note is that the regime will be bombarded with different songs from different directions and it may not always be easy to determine which is loudest. While some will urge it to go now, others will counsel against premature departure. The regime therefore faces the primary difficulty of determining whether to go or not to go with the full awareness of the fact that each decision comes with a package of its own peculiar difficulties and potential problems.

In order to avoid confusion, a military regime will have to be decisive, as a military regime which vacillates will be in greater danger of being subjected to pressure as each group raises its campaign in the hope that the regime can still be persuaded.

Thus, Dare (1981) hypothesized that "the ability of any military regime to remain faithful to and carry out its pledge to disengage is directly related to the relative influence and pressure of the various interests and clienteles." Put differently, if we can establish the positions of the various interest groups and power wielders on disengagement, we will be able to predict whether or not a particular military clique will disengage, but we will not be able to say whether such disengagement will be permanent. If the military decides to quit, it should be with the full realization of the rough terrain ahead, where doubts and uncertainties, misgivings and apprehensions take over. These doubts are prompted by certain fears for which the disengaging regime must find satisfactory answers and assurances if the programme is to go on smoothly. The apprehensions as we stated in 1974 and 1981 revolve around the following fears:

- (a) The fear about the nature of a succeeding regime
- (b) The fear about personal safety after the transition
- (c) The fear of policy reversal
- (d) The fear that military privileges may be curtailed by the

successor

- (e) The fear of political deadlock after disengagement
- (f) The belief that the developmental momentum may not be sustained by the successor regime.
- (g) The belief that civilians are inherently poor administrators.

The conclusion we wish to emphasize is that disengagement is just as problematic as the decision to stay. If a regime is favourably disposed to staying, it can always find plausible rationalizations for that decision. The most convenient explanations are that the civilians have learnt no lessons and that it is only through a continuation of military rule that political chaos can be averted. On the other hand, a regime may set for itself unachievable objectives only to turn round later to blame failure on bad followership.

Problems of Non-Disengaging Regimes

When a regime decides not to disengage, that decision itself carries certain immoral overtones. First of all it will appear as if the lust for power motivates the ruling clique, and such a stigma will erode the legitimacy of the administration. Such a regime will come under heavy criticism from both internal and external opponents and the pro-disengagement groups will become more vocal.

The second major problem of a non-disengaging regime is the clear and present danger that factions within the military who may not be pleased with the performance of the administration and who may also harbour political ambition can now decide on a coup to subvert the regime. If the regime had given what was regarded as a reasonably short notice of disengagement, such a restive faction would have been prepared to wait out the regime and a coup, if at all, would have been contemplated for a period after it has handed power to civilians.

For their part, civilian opponents of the regime will become more vocal and vehement. Such a response grows out of the helplessness of indefinite waiting. Civilians could embark on passive resistance or open opposition to the regime. These opponents of the regime may also conspire by sponsoring elements within the armed forces to stage a coup. Such a civilian-military coalition may share no ideological unity and may be united only in their mutual opposition

to the sit-tight regime. The use of violence to dislodge the regime becomes morally justifiable. In short when a military regime chooses not to disengage, it spends the rest of its tenure battling would-be subversion real or imagined.

Non-Disengagement through Diarchy

Many ruling regimes have attempted to delay or ward off disengagement through a transitional period by setting up a joint-military civilian partnership, popularly known as diarchy. The logic of diarchy is that a joint military-civilian partnership will ensure political stability as the military will prop the weak civilian institutions, while civilians will provide political expertise to aid the military in governing. This symbiotic relationship, it is argued, will prolong indefinitely, military rule as there will be a reduced pressure to have a purely civilian government.

We have argued elsewhere (Dare 1974) that such a partnership is inherently unstable. Any arrangement which puts the military in a senior position will be similar to direct military rule. They will continue to govern by decree with little restraint or input from their civilian supporters. If on the other hand, the military is the junior partner, some officers are likely to become impatient with the slow style of the civilians, and these may decide to seize power from them. In any case a regime of equal civilian-military partnership cannot function decisively and both partners run the risk of being discredited.

The Nigerian Case: The Compulsion to Disengage

From the inception of military rule in 1966, there had always been the general impression among military men and civilians alike that military rule is an aberration, necessitated by the inability of civilian politicians to perform. This feeling sees military men as crises managers whose moral duties are to take corrective measures, cure the system of its ailments, and then return power to the "rightful wielders". In other words, we can claim that Nigerian military men see themselves as "reactive interveners" and not "designed" interveners or revolutionaries. Even if they have a vision of the future of Nigeria, it is not of a distant future. The reactive intervener operates from the position that military rule should be kept very

short and that the rightful role of the military is soldiering from the barracks. The reactive intervener hands power back to civilians after a short period of corrective military administration.

Though the Nzeogwu coup of January 15, 1966 was a popular one, within a very short time, General Ironsi who actually inherited power was under pressure to state categorically when and under what conditions he would hand over power. Before Ironsi had time to make a formal announcement he was toppled on July 29, 1966. Though Ironsi did not make a formal declaration, the debate had started that the regime should consider a period not exceeding three years and within that period, correct the ills of the society and create institutions for civilian politics. If the Ghanaian example (1966-69) is any guide, one could conclude that Ironsi would, like Afrifa of Ghana, with whom he shared peer group orientation and training-comradeship, have been forced to hand over in 1969 at the very latest.

The exit of Ironsi brought in Yakubu Gowon. Gowon had a very shaky start. The northern return march which brought him to power enjoyed limited support among southern civilians and had divided the army along ethnic lines. The first major problem for Gowon was securing southern acceptance of his regime, following the challenge from Ojukwu, the leader of the then Eastern Region. The protracted power tussle between the two culminated in the thirty-month civil war which eventually ended in victory for the Federal forces.

Gowon's Nine Point Programme

After the civil war ended in January 1970, Gowon's regime came under pressure to return politics to politicians. In response to such pressures, on October 1, 1970, Gowon made a national broadcast stating that he would require up to 1976 to complete the programme which read:

1. The re-organization of the Armed Forces.
2. The implementation of the National Development Plan, and the repair of the damage and neglect of the war.
3. The eradication of corruption in our national life.
4. The settlement of the question of the creation of more states.

5. The preparation and adoption of a new constitution.
6. The introduction of a new Revenue Allocation Formula.
7. Conducting a national population census.
8. The organization of elections and installation of popularly elected governments in the states and the centre.
9. The organization of genuine political parties.

A careful examination of this programme merely revealed its vagueness. There were no specification of the dates each or any of the items would be completed. The vagueness, while giving the regime some flexibility, also reduced the credibility of the entire programme. Nigerians would have risen against such vagueness but for the fact that Gowon then enjoyed a large reserve of goodwill and legitimacy from the humane way he handled the ending of the civil war and the post-war reconstruction efforts up to that point in time. In short, most Nigerians gave him the benefit of the doubt. However, Gowon did not take visible steps to prosecute the programme and the closer Nigeria drew to the promised date of 1976, several questions were asked about the seriousness of Gowon's regime. Pressure mounted that Gowon should demonstrate his regime's sincerity by implementing the disengagement programme. It would appear that the inaction on the disengagement programme became the yardstick for evaluating the effectiveness of Gowon's administration. The lack of visible action provided fertile ground for anti-disengagement factions to operate openly, advising Gowon to reconsider handing over. Others attempted to mobilize public opinion in favour of continuation of military rule, saying it did not matter whether the leaders were in Khaki or Agbada.

By 1974, it became clear to all that even if Gowon had wanted to step down in 1976, he could not possibly have carried out most of the nine items in time for the deadline. Conflicting statements by highly placed military officers merely increased the level of uncertainty. Gowon's personal inclinations against disengagement made him listen more to the anti-disengagement voices. Consequently, on October 1, 1974, he declared the original date of 1976 unrealistic but did not substitute an alternative date. He blamed civilians for the failure.

Understandably, there were negative reactions against this breach

of trust. Hostile opinions questioned whether Gowon ever intended to honour the pledge or merely used it to buy public support and time. Kinder opinions argued that Gowon might have underestimated the difficulties of disengagement generally. From public reactions, it was clear that Gowon's regime no longer enjoyed legitimacy as aspiring politicians, intellectuals and some highly placed military officers openly criticized him. It was a question of time before the regime fell to a pro-disengagement faction within the military.

The Murtala/Obasanjo Disengagement Programme

In response to Gowon's failure to honour his pledge and the consequent loss of legitimacy, a coup was executed against him on July 29, 1975. One proof of the unpopularity of Gowon was that he had no one to defend him and therefore, the coup was bloodless. The Murtala Muhammed/Obasanjo regime immediately restored a disengagement programme which listed its five stages as:

Stage 1 - The settlement of the question of States. The state review panel to report by December 1975. The creation of states to be completed by April 1976. A constitution Drafting Committee to submit a draft by September 1976.

Stage 2 - Local Government Reorganization. Elections at the local level without party politics. Establishment of the Constituent Assembly, partly elected and partly nominated. Stage two will last till October 1978.

Stage 3 - The lifting of the ban on politics or abrogation of emergency decree. Formation of political parties.

Stage 4 - The Elections to State and Federal Legislatures.

Stage 5 - Handing over on October 1, 1979.

The difference between this pledge and Gowon's was that there were specific dates when certain activities would be completed. This specificity made it a more sincere pledge than Gowon's Nine- Points, and for this reason, there was no problem of credibility. As long as the regime was seen carrying out the promise, its legitimacy was sustained; it only had to wave off anti- disengagement factions.

The regime remained steadfast to the disengagement programme

giving no room for doubt or for the anti-disengagement groups. When suggestions were made as to a reconsideration of the deadline, General Obasanjo came down hard on those making such demands affirming his earlier position thus:

Fears and lack of faith have led to whisperings and unaltruistic campaigns in some quarters for the military to reconsider their political programme. As professional military men, we believe that the greatest heritage we can leave behind, apart from a united, stable and economically strong country, is an untarnished Armed Forces, Armed services that are professionally competent to protect and defend the country in peace and war. Whatever may be the motives of those who have embarked upon this subtle but dangerous campaign, it cannot be in the best interest of our country, more so when there is no cause whatsoever for this administration to reconsider its political programme. As men of honour, we in this Administration are bound by our words and pledge and 1979 remains realistic.

This rigidity gave the Obasanjo regime no room for adjustment. The regime however saw no danger to its achievements and thus did not take any overt preemptive action to prevent its political enemies from succeeding it. For this reason, the regime did not ban any politicians from contesting for election, nor did it specify the type and number of political parties it would tolerate. Since it failed to state these openly, the regime had to resort to *remote control* and electoral manipulation to achieve its goals and ensure that its political opponents did not win. A lot has been written on how General Obasanjo handed power to Shagari in 1979. In retrospect it could be seen that the Obasanjo regime manipulated the electoral system to install a regime it had linkages with, and a regime which during the electioneering campaign, promised not to probe the activities of the departing military government. Reference is usually made to the interpretation for what constituted $\frac{2}{3}$ of the states in the federation and the hasty manner a new Chief Justice was appointed before Chief Awolowo's appeal reached the Supreme Court

Given the cordial working relationship between the Obasanjo

regime and the in-coming Shagari administration, the 1979 change from military to civilian rule was quite smooth and orderly. As promised by candidate Shagari, there were no probes into the activities of the military regime and the retired military officers enjoyed whatever activities they went into without molestation. General Obasanjo for his part avoided all comments on the activities of the successor regime, at least not during the first term of the Shagari regime. It was only after the 1983 elections and the mishandling of the nation's economic problems that General Obasanjo said anything critical of Shagari. His comments have been said to represent the prelude to Shagari's ouster which came on December 31, 1983, barely three months into the second four-year term.

The Return of the Military (1983-1989)

The poor performance of the Shagari regime (1979-1983) gave the military a good excuse to come back to politics. The unpopularity of the deposed regime made Buhari's arrival popular. There was so much public support for the coup that some humourously termed it "the real verdict 83".

The Buhari regime reacted to the popular welcome by taking stern measures against the deposed politicians and members of the general public alike. It identified indiscipline as the bane of society and thought through decree and military fiat the entire society could be restructured. Life imprisonment, death penalty and so on, were promulgated even for minor offences. The so called W.A.I. brigades and the Nigerian Security Organization (NSO) had a field day. Very soon fear replaced love for the regime. This, coupled with the worsening national economic situation, eroded the legitimacy of Buhari's administration within its first year in office. It had no time to announce a disengagement programme before the Babangida's coup came in August 1985. This, being a coup against a military regime, similar to a palace coup, needed justification.

The new administration rightly identified high-handedness and general official cruelty as precipitants of the action against the Buhari regime and thus promised a more humane conduct of public affairs. Political detainees and others held by the N.S.O. were ordered to be tried or released. Ridiculously long jail sentences

which had earlier been imposed on corrupt politicians were reviewed, tribunals were set up to review previous trials and many prisoners were given options of fine. These actions constitute the human rights credentials of the Babangida regime. In order to maintain the legitimacy of his administration, on January 13, 1986, within five months of coming to power, President Babangida followed historical necessity and announced that his administration intended to hand over to civilians in 1990. Preparatory to this, he set up a seventeen man Political Bureau to seek popular opinions on a future political formula. The Political Bureau had a year to submit its report.

The Bureau made extensive tour of the country and held discussions in all the local government areas of the federation. It produced a comprehensive report which was submitted to government on March 27, 1987. This was considered extensively by a Government subcommittee before a White Paper was issued.

The major problem of the White Paper was that government changed its original date of 1990 to 1992 and therefore had to provide copious justifications without which its credibility would have been in doubt. The time table for the Political Programme was long and fairly comprehensive (See Appendix).

Comments on the Babangida's Transition Programme

The first significant development in the programme was that the original date of 1990 was shifted to 1992 giving the regime seven years altogether. This was more than the conventional life-span of an elected regime. Such a change would have created credibility problems for the regime, but it was able to overcome such problems by listing in details activities which would be performed throughout the entire period.

Secondly, the regime followed up by announcing that certain categories of politicians were banned from participating in political competition during the transition period. This ban too would not have been well received but for the fact that it was extended to military personnel and members of the ruling council as well. In other words, self ban helped the regime to restore its credibility and the legitimacy of the transition arrangements. As long as there were visible signs that the items listed were being carried out on schedule,

the generality of the population would continue to support the regime's efforts at disengagement.

However, President Babangida's regime is fast acquiring a reputation for its policy of deliberate destabilization of political actors. By this we mean the frequent and surprise changes in personnel. We have in mind the practice of not allowing officers to remain at a post for more than three years before moving them elsewhere. Governors, Ministers and most recently the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) the National Electoral Commission etc. have all been subjected to this policy. This is bad for the transition programme and bad for political stability. Affected officers are not able to complete their projects before being given the marching orders, such as governors who only spent one year in a state and were told to move to another. One would have thought only incompetent officers would be affected by such redeployment and the good ones allowed to continue with their good works.

The adverse effects of this policy have been to create instability and a dependency on the President. Since subordinates are not sure of the next move, the tendency would be to attempt to please the boss through uncritical obedience.

Similarly, the frequent changes increase the number of those who have tasted of the "forbidden fruit" i.e. political office, and thus expands the pool of future praetorians. In summary, while this policy of deliberate destabilization may ensure the survival of the present regime, it undermines the process of institutionalization and will facilitate future intervention. What the regime does to survive therefore ensures the non-survival of its successor.

Conclusion

Voluntary military disengagement is rarely unconditional. The fears we highlighted above make every disengaging military regime to attempt to protect itself against reprisals from the successor regime. For this reason, military regimes all attempt to screen their successors to ensure that their policies and privileges would be continued. This situation is what has generated what is now regarded as "the handover conspiracy". If officers can find an acceptable civilian group which can be manipulated into office, they will do so. Alternatively, they may attempt to prevent certain groups from

inheriting office through disqualification decrees. All these are happening today in Nigeria. The President's statement at the tenth graduation ceremony of the National Institute that his regime was not interested in any successor can at best be described as hypocritical for a corrective regime.

The Prospects for the Future

If we look back at all we have said so far, the question which readily comes to mind is whether the military is capable of actually disengaging. Finer attempted to answer a similar question in the 60's when he identified four conditions for military disengagement. He asserted that for disengagement to occur:

- (a) The leaders shall sincerely want his troops to quit politics.
- (b) The military should be able to establish a regime capable of functioning without further military intervention and assistance.
- (c) The successor regime should be acceptable to the armed forces and
- (d) The military itself should have sufficient confidence in its leaders so as to return to the barracks on order.

While the fulfilment of these conditions can send the military to the barracks, we require more to keep them there. Since a coup is very rarely an operation for the entire armed forces, one group may disengage while another prepares for a takeover. It becomes the game of musical chairs.

The best security against military usurpation is a responsive and effective civilian regime. Even though there will always be officers who nurse political ambition, they will have difficulty in justifying their actions if they intervene against a popular civilian regime. In addition, they may experience massive resistance from the populace and thus find it difficult to govern.

A second factor which can discourage frivolous military intervention is the failure of military rule itself. All over Africa, events have shown that the military are not all angels, and the hopes that military rule would usher in rapid economic development have remained largely unfulfilled. Almost in all societies, the smiles which

welcomed the initial arrival of the military have grown into frowns, and the citizens, groaning under attendant mismanagement, are saying to themselves "never again". The implication of this is that citizens generally have become intolerant of military rule. If anything, military rule has discredited the military. The awareness on the part of the officers that they are unwelcomed may dampen the urge to present themselves as puritans chasing the money changers from the National Assembly. Such awareness also will discourage civilian groups from urging the military to take over each time things do not appear to go their way.

A third factor is the fact that political involvement accentuates the cleavages among the armed forces. The frequency of coups against military regimes bring into clear relief the nature of these divisions. These are ethnic, class, generational cleavages or may be divisions among those who have tasted political office and those who have not, who may now like their own opportunity. These make coups endemic.

Suggestions

The morbid fear of coups has reached such an alarming proportion that the Constituent Assembly did on several occasions discuss how to prevent coups. In addition to a dyarchy already discussed above, members suggested the establishment of A COUP PREVENTION COUNCIL (Guardian Monday Jan. 30, 1989) with the same status as the National Population Commission or the National Electoral Commission. Membership of the body, it was suggested, would be drawn from the public, industry, economists, security agencies and lecturers of psychology.

The responsibility of the Council it was said, would be to prepare programmes and initiate actions that will help to constantly educate soldiers and the Nigerian public on their right to accept or reject any government that comes to power through undemocratic means. This is like Section 1(2) of the 1979 Constitution which invalidated coups. It stated: "The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed, nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the Government of Nigeria, or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution." This provision did not prevent coups.

In any case, such a council will be one of the first casualties of a successful coup. Therefore, the prevention of a coup is not going to be aided by constitutional provisions. The reasons soldiers find it so easy to take over power is essentially because they have the monopoly of sophisticated weapons of violence. Common logic suggests that coups will become more difficult to hatch if that monopoly were to be broken. There is therefore a need to increase the number of men and women who are trained in the handling of modern weapons who remain outside the regular armed forces. Such men and women can act as counter force to political adventurism. We suggest that basic military training be given to members of the National Youth Service Corp. This training should be gradually extended to all undergraduates in Nigerian universities and tertiary institutions.

Closely related to this is the need to liberalize gun laws so that all those who have been trained under the programme suggested above can possess weapons if they choose to. In addition to self protection, the new corp could form the nucleus of the National Guard or a National Resistance force against future coups. The initiation of this corp indeed will show the sincerity of the military regime about preventing future coups, and complement the efforts of such agencies as MAMSER.

Thirdly, the present trend of premature retirement of military personnel should stop. There have been too many cases of young officers who advance to the top rather quickly and then retire to occupations far removed from soldiering. These officers retire from the armed forces at the time when the nation would benefit from their cumulative experience.

The accelerated advancement of many of these officers have been facilitated by coups. This demonstration effect lures younger officers into scheming for coups, hoping later to retire after a taste of political office. One can therefore say that the diversion into politics is fast becoming part of the career expectations of most Nigerian officers. This trend has to stop. One way to stop it is to decree that anyone who retires from the armed forces before age 55 should receive no pension. This provision may encourage professionalism and discourage coups. Yet, only a military regime can promulgate such a law, for if left to the civilian administration, the armed forces

will regard such a law by civilians as an erosion of military privileges, and may act quickly to terminate the administration. This is indeed the nature of the praetorian trap.

Finally, I will like to conclude this lecture by paying tribute to those to whom it is due. I want to publicly express my appreciation to members of my family for being steadfast and supportive. I also want to thank all members of staff of the Department of Political Science, both past and present, who, through their brotherly relations have made the department one of the most peaceful places to work.

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APPENDIX

TIME-TABLE FOR THE POLITICAL PROGRAMME

3rd Quarter – 1987:

Establishment of the Directorate of Social Mobilization.

Establishment of a National Electoral Commission.

Establishment of a Constitution Drafting committee.

4th Quarter – 1987:

Elections into the Local Governments on Non-Party Basis.

1st Quarter – 1988:

Establishment of National Population Commission.

Establishment of Code of Conduct Bureau.

Establishment of Code of Conduct Tribunal.

Establishment of Constituent Assembly.

Inauguration of National Revenue Mobilization Commission.

2nd Quarter – 1988:

Termination of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

3rd Quarter – 1988:

Consolidation of gains of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

4th Quarter – 1988:

Consolidation of gains of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

1st Quarter – 1989:

Promulgation of a New Constitution.

Release of New Fiscal Arrangements.

2nd Quarter – 1989:

Lift of ban on Party Politics.

3rd Quarter – 1989:

Announcement of two recognised and registered Political Parties.

4th Quarter – 1989:

Election into State Legislatures and State Executives.

4th Quarter – 1989:

Election into Local Governments on Political Party Basis.

1st and 2nd Quarters – 1990:

Election into State Legislatures and State Executives.

3rd Quarter — 1990:

Convening of State Legislatures.

4th Quarter — 1990:

Swearing-in of State Executives.

1st quarter — 1991:

Census

2nd Quarter -- 1991:

Census

3rd Quarter — 1991:

Census

4th Quarter — 1991:

Local Government Elections.

1st and 2nd Quarters — 1992:

Elections into Federal Legislatures and convening of National Assembly.

3rd and 4th quarters — 1992:

President Election.

Swearing-in of New President and final disengagement by the Armed Forces.