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Security Reform
in Democratic
Nigeria

Alao Abiodun

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Map

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Security Reform in Democratic Nigeria

Introduction

Observers of Nigerian politics are sometimes baffled by the complexity of the divisions within the country. Anthony Kirk-Greene described some of these scissions in the introduction to his two-volume compilation of the 1967–70 civil war:

‘[Nigeria] has been bedevilled by a set of oppositions – generalised, stereotype, not necessarily of the same order and maybe imaginary, yet each widening the wound and reducing the hope of healing it: North v South, Islam v Christianity, alleged feudalism v assumed socialism, federal v unitary preferences, traditional authority v achieved élitism, haves v have-nots, each with sinister undertones of tension, irreconcilability and threatened withdrawal.’¹

While opinions may differ as to who should be held responsible for the problem, there seems to be no doubt that it has been perpetrated and exploited by successive governments in order to consolidate their grip on power. In this respect, perhaps the most important element that has been misused is the security apparatus. Indeed, security-sector management has been a key issue in Nigeria since the country gained its independence from Britain on 1 October 1960. This is not only because of the aforementioned divisions, but also because the issue has been tied in a complicated way to the politics of governance, and to the activities of civil society.

What actually constitutes security-sector reform, and how such programmes should be approached, is an emerging and controversial debate.² The term itself is rarely used in African countries, but it is widely understood as the need to transform and to regenerate the security sector in order to meet a number of post-Cold War realities.³ Most analysts seem to agree that a comprehensive examination of the subject must encompass both military and human security, which involves fundamental questions of governance, development, and conflict management. This monograph concentrates on the military side of the equation, since management of the armed forces was the most immediate problem that confronted the new administration.

After communism started to collapse, radical changes occurred to the international security landscape that contributed to the redefinition of security – although this process was underway before 1989. A combination of political and intellectual trends prompted policymakers to relate security matters to democratic processes. The concept of security-sector reform is, in part, the outcome of this shift. Foreign donors and international financial institutions are now prepared to extend their demands for transparency and accountability to decision-making in the security

sector. In some cases, they are also seeking to reduce military expenditure, especially when excessive spending on weapons of dubious military utility is identified.

While the importance of reform is clear, there is disagreement on how to achieve success. Some analysts prefer a 'top-down' model, using leverage to convince decision-makers to introduce requisite changes. Other observers believe that security-sector reform should be achieved through the electorate and the mobilisation of civic institutions.

Various interwoven dynamics are fundamental for understanding the position of the security sector in Nigeria. Almost 30 of the 39 years since independence have been spent under military rule, and the population has become accustomed to a way of life in which traditions and institutions have been significantly influenced by the armed forces. The concept of 'security' became rigidly militarised, and the politics and processes of 'reform' were manipulated and controlled by officers with a vested interest in protecting their hold on power. Successive governments (civilian and military) pursued haphazard and self-serving security agendas, while civil society was 'shoehorned' into conformity. As a result, security-sector reform in Nigeria is as confused as it is invidious.

The country's security dynamics are inextricably linked with its national politics. While an in-depth analysis of the domestic political scene is beyond the scope of this monograph, there are a number of contradictory elements that need to be noted.

- First, the three largest ethnic groups – *Hausa-Fulani*, *Ibo* and *Yoruba* – are often sufficiently united to dominate the minority groups, but not enough to eliminate mutual suspicion.
- Second, the military institution was divided in many ways, but it seemed united in its determination to influence national politics. Furthermore, its members wanted to remain in power at all costs, even in a civilian form after retirement.
- Third, the civilian political élite may often have clamoured for democratic change, but they have always been quick to co-operate with the army after it has overthrown a democratic government.⁴
- Fourth, the political climate dissuaded the majority of the population from demanding the right to express its views on security-sector management.

The attitudes of successive administrations towards security-sector reform were shaped by their particular security priorities. The government's primary mission after independence was to safeguard the fledgling nation against external attack, leading to the infamous Anglo-Nigeria Defence Agreement. But the wider population saw neo-colonial dependence on Britain as a greater source of insecurity, which forced the government to abrogate the pact.⁵ From the mid-1960s, the focus shifted from external to internal security. Under the administration of General Yakubu Gowon (1966–75), the main determinant of security policy was managing the ramifications

of the civil war in the 'Republic of Biafra' – which was declared in Nigeria's former Eastern Region in May 1967.⁶ Gowon was eventually overthrown in a bloodless coup on 29 July 1975, as a result of rising opposition to government ineptitude, dissatisfaction among young officers, especially those who held a middle-ranking position during the civil war, and delays over the holding of free elections.

The succeeding government (1975–79) of General Murtala Muhammed – who was assassinated in an abortive coup on 13 February 1976 – and his deputy and successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo, tried to address the level of decadence in the military and civil service, resulting in the mass and sometimes irrational retirements of public officials. The government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979–83) attempted to pursue a policy of regime survival, but it was unable to strike an acceptable balance between what the military wanted and what civilians were prepared to give. Consequently, it was overthrown in a coup on 31 December 1983. The incoming administration of General Muhammadu Buhari (1983–85) decided to target 'indiscipline' and corruption, but its high-handed approach led to a bloodless coup in the army and the installation of General Ibrahim Babangida on 27 August 1985.

Babangida's accession usually marks the starting point for most analysis on the current state of the Nigerian security sector. Under his leadership, an insidious culture of corruption became entrenched, and greed, indiscipline and nepotism had an unparalleled influence on the lives of ordinary Nigerians.⁷ The regime's greatest claim to notoriety, though, was the fraudulent 'democratic restoration' project – originally scheduled for completion on 1 October 1990 – which almost destroyed the structure of governance in Nigeria. Political parties were formed and disbanded, bans on politicians were imposed and lifted, and, ultimately, the administration chose to abort the entire process, nullifying the 12 June 1993 election victory by the southern tycoon and *Yoruba* Muslim, Chief Moshood Abiola. This decision pushed Nigeria to the brink of civil war and reinforced the belief that a single ethnic group had appropriated the exclusive right to produce national leaders.⁸

Most people suspected that there was a hidden agenda behind the Babangida transition exercise, but they did not think that the holders of public office would go to such lengths to pursue a programme that was deliberately designed to fail. While many Nigerians had little respect for the military, the institution – up until this time – still had a reputation for at least honouring its hand-over promises. This image was dented slightly when Gowon reneged on his pledge to transfer power to civilians in 1976, although the effects of the betrayal were cushioned by the country's then economic prosperity. The Muhammed–Obasanjo regime transferred power to civilians as arranged in 1979, and even the Buhari administration refused to make hand-over promises that it could not keep. The decision to annul the 1993 election result, however, removed any doubt from the minds of the people that the armed forces wanted to remain perpetually in power. From this moment, the trust between the army and the people was irretrievably broken, and the 'demystification' of the military became irreversible.

A groundswell of internal and external opposition to the annulment decision forced Babangida to 'step aside' on 27 August 1993.⁹ He was initially replaced by the interim administration of Chief Ernest Shonekan, a successful industrialist and *Yoruba*. But Babangida's former Chief of Defence Staff, General Sani Abacha, ousted Shonekan, on 17 November 1993, in the country's ninth military coup since independence. Many people believed that Abacha's accession was part of a grander scheme between the new leader and Babangida, since he was the only service chief left in office after the former Head of State had decided to retire. The Abacha regime took internal security to a new level of ruthlessness, destroyed any residual public respect for the armed forces, and further demystified the military institution.

The dictator's obsession with becoming an elected civilian president coloured all aspects of security policy, setting him on a collision course with pro-democracy groups, and even with some members of the army. Serving and retired military officers were jailed for spurious coup plots. Indeed, by the time of Abacha's death on 8 June 1998, the only effective security structures left were the ones intended for internal repression – such as the notorious *Strike Force* and *K-Squad* – presidential bodyguards, and those receiving state patronage for trying to deliver the civilian presidency to the late leader.

As popular belief in the prolonged transition exercise evaporated, the population intensified its struggle against continued military rule. Spontaneous and widespread condemnation prevented Abacha from formally declaring his candidacy in the presidential poll, and, by June 1998, it was clear that the days of army dictatorship in Nigeria were numbered. People were not only talking about the armed forces leaving power, but that they should be held accountable for the mismanagement of the country. As a result, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who replaced the late dictator on 9 June 1998, could no longer stem – even if he wanted to – the tide of anti-military sentiment in Nigeria.

Introduction Endnotes

¹ Kirk-Greene, A.H.M., *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria, Volume 1, January 1966–July 1967*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.4.

² See Hendrickson, D., 'A Review of Security-Sector Reform', The Conflict, Security and Development Group, *Working Papers*, Number 1, (London: Centre for Defence Studies, 1999).

³ For a more in-depth assessment, see Alao, A., 'The Politics of Security Sector Reform in West Africa', *Brassey's Defence Yearbook 1999*, (London: Brassey's, 1999).

⁴ Directors of most of the country's professional associations, and even pro-democracy leaders, have participated in past military administrations. Academics have served as state and federal commissioners and as heads of parastatals. At one stage, former leaders of the Nigerian Bar Association and the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities – some of the most prominent and radical unions in the country – served as ministers in the cabinet.

⁵ See Idang, G., 'The Politics of Nigerian Foreign Policy: The Ratification and Renunciation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement', *African Studies Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2, September 1970.

⁶ Mass mobilisation during the war served as an antecedent to the militarised culture that was to engulf the country. The end of the conflict highlighted the need for specific legislation to address armed robbery and the proliferation of light weapons.

⁷ Tajudeen Abdulraheem summed this up best when he described the actions of the Babangida regime as 'democratised looting'.

⁸ Abiola was the first person from the south-west to win a national election.

⁹ In his final speech to the nation, Babangida used this phrase to describe his exit from politics. However, many Nigerians suspected that the move could be another attempt to manipulate power from behind the scenes.

Chapter 1

The security sector and the democratic transition

From the moment Abubakar replaced Abacha and promised that power would be handed over to a civilian administration by 29 May 1999, many political observers recognised that stability would depend on how well, and how comprehensively, the security apparatus was managed in the future. They pointed out that Nigeria's political problems were rooted in the state's inability to develop a security apparatus capable of addressing the complex mixture of ethnic, social, economic and political tensions in the country. Indeed, all Nigerians realised that certain fundamental changes would have to be made in the security sector before there could be an enduring democratic process.

From both the political and military perspectives, Abubakar took possession of a nation in crisis. He inherited an army that was demoralised, weakened by decades of infighting, and lacking the respect of the civilian population because of its involvement in politics. For a long time, ethnic differences in the armed forces had been concealed beneath a boisterous display of superficial camaraderie. Instead, the more conspicuous division was between those who held political office – and, as a result, had access to enormous wealth and influence – and those who were denied this privilege. When Abubakar took over the leadership, however, ethnic considerations had become more prominent in the politics of the military.

But what must have been more disturbing for Abubakar was the weak *esprit de corps* in the senior ranks. Indeed, the most immediate security problem that Abubakar faced on assuming power was related to the question of cohesion. The issue centred around Abacha's former Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Oladipo Diya, and a number of other senior army officers, who had been 'found guilty' of plotting to overthrow the late President, and had been sentenced to death. However, the execution had not been carried out before Abacha passed away, and Abubakar was left with the task of deciding the fate of the condemned officers.

With regard to the politics of security-sector reform, two aspects of the controversy are of particular interest:

- Diya claimed that he had been 'set-up' by the then Chief of Army Staff, General Ishaya Bamaïyi. Regardless of the validity of the allegation, it further showed the fragility of *esprit de corps* within the higher echelons of the armed forces, and must have highlighted to Abubakar the weakness of the structure that he had inherited; and

- most of the senior officers who were implicated in the coup were *Yorubas*, creating the impression that the charge could be a way of eliminating them from the upper levels of the military hierarchy.

The political problems that were bequeathed to Abubakar were equally profound. Harmonious relations between the country's myriad ethnic groups had reached a low point, with conflicts – often over management of national resources – continuing to rise. Minorities in the oil-producing Niger Delta were fighting among themselves and fomenting violent demonstrations against the federal government. Confrontations were also erupting in other parts of the country, between, for example, the *Umuleri* and the *Aguleri* in Anambra State, the *Ifè* and *Modakeke* in Osun State, the *Nembes* and *Bassambiris* in Bayelsa State, and the *Tivs*, *Junkuns*, *Ketebs*, *Takumas* and *Idomas* in the Middle Belt. Many of these conflicts had been cynically manipulated by the military administration, especially over the location of local-government headquarters.

However, the effects of the nullified 1993 election presented Abubakar with his greatest political challenge. Various movements and organisations (both inside and outside of Nigeria) were demanding the release of Abiola – who had been imprisoned after laying claim to the presidency on 11 June 1994 – and recognition of the poll result. Despite efforts to suppress the opposition, Abiola's supporters continued to demand the implementation of the election's principles, including the convening of a 'sovereign national conference' to decide the future of the Nigerian state.

Other key security-sector and governance issues facing the government included:

- setting up a credible civilian administration;
- keeping the military united and out of politics;
- making the government more accountable;
- reducing corruption by state officials;
- establishing peaceful relations between the country's disparate ethnic groups;
- managing internal security and resource-based conflicts, especially in the Niger Delta;
- reorganising the judiciary and the police;
- increasing the accountability and effectiveness of Nigerian forces that are participating in regional military operations; and
- pacifying the *Yorubas* of the south-west, who felt aggrieved by the nullification of the 1993 election result.

The transitional administration also confronted a key security-sector dilemma: although the security apparatus was widely unpopular because of the way it had been misused by Abacha, it was too strong to be either dismissed or reformed. In addition, Abubakar was constrained from carrying out decisive security-sector reforms because

he had held the third most important position in the Abacha administration (Chief of Defence Staff) and was, therefore, part of the decision-making machinery that had discredited the regime. Consequently, Abubakar could only introduce some cosmetic changes, purging the extreme elements of the Abacha security apparatus, while retaining those that, if removed, could threaten his hold on power.

These reforms were geared towards:

- guaranteeing a clear exit strategy, which would allow Abubakar and other senior officers from the Abacha era to retire from the military in peace;
- giving the democratic transition some form of international credibility, even if it was considered to be flawed at home; and
- ensuring that the military were placated and did not lose out completely in the transition exercise, while, at the same time, trying to win civilian support.

In pursuit of this delicate balance of objectives, the Abubakar administration refused to reverse the election annulment of 1993, to form a government of national unity, and to convene a sovereign national conference. Furthermore, the administration delayed releasing Abiola from jail, but gradually freed some individuals who had been convicted of allegedly attempting to overthrow the Abacha government. General Obasanjo was the first such person to be released and pardoned, leading many observers to think that this move – not to mention the relative ease with which he won the People’s Democratic Party (PDP)’s nomination and leadership – was part of a military-backed arrangement to relinquish power to someone who knew how to play the military game. General Sheu Musa Yar’Adua, Obasanjo’s former deputy, who had died in detention in December 1997, was given a posthumous pardon. And Diya and other alleged coup plotters, such as Tajudeen Olanrewaju and Abdulkarim Adisa,¹⁰ were only granted their freedom under certain conditions, including loss of rank and expulsion from the armed forces.¹¹

Little was done, however, to prepare the army for civilian rule. Although some sections of the armed forces received a degree of guidance from interested non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the form of lectures and training programmes, these were neither sufficiently intensive or extensive, nor were they properly organised. For their part, the civilian élite concentrated exclusively on the transition programme without considering the structures under which the new administration would have to operate. For instance, there were no formal guidelines to aid and direct the democratic exercise. A 25-member Review Committee, which was established to promote debate on a new constitution, was unstructured, and the civilian élite, who were preoccupied with capturing power, showed little interest in the process. Many Nigerians also believed that the Committee was flawed since it consisted of individuals who, under Babangida and Abacha, had allegedly helped to destroy the 1979 Constitution. Even after the redrafting process had been completed, the Provisional Ruling Council (PRC) delayed releasing the text of the

new constitution to the public. In the absence of a constitution to guide the transition process, it was inevitable that some otherwise avoidable errors would occur. Finally, civil society was also not appropriately equipped for the transition and initiatives to rectify the problem – including workshops and seminars – only started just before the election.¹²

1.1 Preparation for democracy

As soon as he took control of the country, Abubakar came across as a leader who was anxious to hand over power without tackling the controversial issues that could make his government vulnerable. His primary concern was to ensure that the transition took place in the shortest possible timeframe, regardless of the circumstances. Potentially difficult matters were left to the incoming civilian administration. Corruption, which had characterised both the Babangida and Abacha regimes, continued unabated. State governors were known to have looted their coffers, denying the majority of their civilian successors the resources to manage state affairs.¹³ Some of the decisions made by the Abubakar administration even appeared to undermine the incoming government's agenda, including:

- the approval of 41 new ambassadors just prior to the 29 May 1999 hand over;
- the appointment of new federal permanent secretaries to the civil service, taking effect from 1 June 1999; and
- privatisations, which a number of observers believed were designed to give the military more opportunities for 'rent seeking'.¹⁴

Many Nigerians thus believed that Abubakar might not be a dependable guardian of the democratic transition. Nonetheless, they were willing to support his programme in order to end military government.

From its inception, Abubakar's transition project faced a major credibility crisis. The new leader had to convince a largely sceptical domestic audience that his approach to the democratic exercise was genuine, and that it would not be 'hijacked' in mid-course by the army – which many people thought was unwilling to surrender power. Both Babangida and Abacha had organised transition programmes – lasting almost 15 years – and had promised that the mistakes of the past would not be repeated.¹⁵ Public suspicion was also heightened by the fact that, as mentioned earlier, Abubakar was a member of the PRC in the two previous regimes, and was known to be particularly close to Babangida.¹⁶

To convince the people of his good intentions, Abubakar created the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), headed by Justice Ephraim Akpata. The INEC replaced the National Electoral Commission (NEC) and the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which had organised the transition programmes under Babangida and Abacha respectively. After assessing

their popularity at local elections, three political parties were registered for the presidential poll.

- The Alliance for Democracy (AD). The support base of the AD is in the south-west, and most party members backed the struggle to respect the 1993 election result. In fact, many senior members served jail terms or went into exile during Abacha's administration.
- The All People's Party (APP). The APP has more of a hybrid composition. Prominent senior members had supported Abacha's questionable transition programme and his self-succession campaign.¹⁷
- The People's Democratic Party. The PDP contains a number of individuals who held military and political positions in previous administrations.¹⁸

It is difficult to discern the views of the three political parties towards key security-sector issues because their manifestos were not shared with, or explained to, the electorate. Some idea of their attitudes, though, can be gleaned from statements made during the election campaign. For example, the parties agreed on the need to restructure the security sector, the police and the judiciary, and they all promised to make the security of citizens a top priority. In addition, they all underlined their determination to prevent the military from retaking power. But none of them explained in any detail how they would meet these objectives.

1.2 Participation of the military

The most contentious aspect of the transition was the extent to which retired military officers actively participated in the process.¹⁹ Their involvement highlighted a number of questions regarding the future of the Nigerian security sector.

- First, many of these officers played important roles in the discredited regimes of Babangida and Abacha, and were known to be corrupt and/or controversial. Consequently, it was feared that they would bring the same bad practices to civilian politics.
- Second, given that most of the retired officers belonged to the PDP – which also had Obasanjo, a former general, as its presidential candidate – a number of people wondered how free and fair the election would be. During the poll, it was widely believed that the transition had been stage-managed, and that, having been forced out of office, the military would only transfer control to the party that would best protect its interests.
- Third, many people feared that, even if the election was credible, a party dominated by retired generals might not be particularly sensitive to security-sector reform. Obasanjo's opponents made his military background a major campaign issue, but the PDP countered this argument by pointing out that the

vice-presidential candidate of the AD–APP alliance – which was formed in a last-minute bid to defeat the PDP – Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, used to head the ruthless Nigerian Security Organisation (NSO), later called the State Security Service. The NSO was set up by the Muhammed–Obasanjo administration as a ‘watchdog of public security’, but, in later years, it became a ‘para-political organ’ of government. The organisation was granted wide powers, which allowed it to detain and deal with potential enemies of the regime, including those within the armed forces.²⁰

- Fourth, these officers contributed a considerable amount of money to Obasanjo’s campaign fund, creating the impression that he would have no choice but to defend military concerns. Persistent allegations that Babangida largely bankrolled Obasanjo’s presidential bid reinforced this view, and led many people to conclude that he would not be able to implement much needed security-sector reforms.²¹

In the end, the election, which was held on 27 February 1999, followed the pattern of earlier polls. Obasanjo amassed 18,738,154 votes compared to the 11,110,287 of the former Finance Minister and AD–APP candidate, Chief Olu Falae.²² Many people expected Obasanjo to win the election, but the margin was wider than anticipated. Allegations of voter fraud and other irregularities culminated in an unsuccessful attempt by Falae to challenge the outcome in the courts. The result reflected not so much the ethnic divisions in Nigeria, but more the emerging ideological split, particularly between those who favoured radical changes to current socio-economic and political policies, and those who preferred milder alterations to the status quo.

Although Obasanjo had a wealth of political experience, and had played a major role in international diplomacy – especially as co-chair of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group on South Africa – he had to convince the people that he could separate his army background from his new role in civilian government. He also had to contend with a population that had been both brutalised and strengthened by decades of military misrule, and had become more determined and vocal in its demand for good governance. Moreover, the public euphoria that followed Abacha’s death made many Nigerians overlook the fact that a return to democracy was only the beginning of an extremely difficult process. It was against this backdrop that Obasanjo took on the challenge of security-sector reform.

Chapter 1 Endnotes

¹⁰ These two generals were former ministers in the Abacha cabinet: Adisa was responsible for housing; and Olanrewaju was in charge of communications.

¹¹ Initially, it was unclear whether loss of rank was a condition for their release. Diya and other observers insisted that no such stipulation had been attached, but a military spokesperson stressed that this was the case. The new Minister of Defence, General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma, seemed to confirm this statement when he advised Diya and the other alleged coup plotters to go before the Oputa Panel on Human Rights to ask for the restoration of their ranks.

¹² The UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Nigerian Civil Liberty Organisation (CLO) convened a Constitutional Conference in October 1998, while the London-based Centre for Democracy and Development held an Expert Group Meeting in November 1998.

¹³ The Governor of Kogi State, Abubakar Audu, personally went to Obasanjo to complain that it was impossible for him to administer the State with the debt that he had inherited from his predecessor, Lieutenant Colonel Augustine Aniebo.

¹⁴ Oil prospecting licenses were granted to serving and retired military officers, some of who allegedly had other personal ties to Abubakar. Generals were also allocated plots of land in exclusive parts of Lagos and Abuja, although some of these have since been taken away by the Obasanjo administration.

¹⁵ For example, Babangida argued that Obasanjo's 1979 transition programme could not produce a durable democracy because the exercise was rushed; he claimed that a longer process was necessary to ensure success. As a result, Babangida spent eight years on a project that ended with the nullification of the 1993 election. Abacha contended that the failure was due to the imposition on the voting public of two opposing parties. Although the late dictator preached about multiparty politics, he ensured that all of the parties adopted him as their consensus candidate.

¹⁶ Both of them are from Minna in Niger State.

¹⁷ Many people interpreted the acronym to mean the 'Abacha People's Party'.

¹⁸ This is a crude division, in many cases supporters cut across these lines.

¹⁹ Some of the retired generals who played an active political role, either publicly or behind the scenes, include: Obasanjo, Babangida, Danjuma, General Aliyu Mohammed Gusau, General Garba Duba, General David Jemibewon, General Abubakar Waziri, General Muhammadu Jega, Rear-Admiral Murtala Nyako, Major-General David Ejoor, Major-General Ike Nwachukwu, Air Commodore Dan Suleiman, Brigadier General Tunde Ogbega, Brigadier General John Shagaya, Brigadier General Sani Bello, Brigadier General Alilu Akilu, Brigadier General Ahmed Abdullahi, Brigadier General David Mark, Brigadier General Bello Khalle, Brigadier General Tanko Ayuba, Brigadier General Mohammed Magoro and Brigadier General Abba Kyari.

²⁰ Osaghae, E., *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), p. 82.

²¹ Babangida denied sponsoring Obasanjo, and the new President also insisted that the allegation was untrue. There were claims that Babangida had also bankrolled other parties.

²² Fourteen million people voted in the 1993 election, and the sudden increase to 30m in 1999 was considered suspicious.

Chapter 2

The army and democracy

Reformation of the defence force is at the centre of every discussion on security-sector reform in Nigeria. Although the primary concern is ensuring that the military recognises and observes the supremacy of democratic institutions, other important considerations include guaranteeing that the armed forces respect – even when they are not in office – civilians and their fundamental human rights. Having held power for some three decades, the military believed that its authority could not be questioned, and, for a long time, the civilian population also conceded that the institution's dominance could not be challenged. By the start of the latest transition, though, attitudes had changed, and – as outlined in the introduction – the army had unintentionally embarked on its demystification mission.

On the eve of democratic rule, the type of security-sector reforms desired by the Nigerian people could be categorised as follows:

- the military should have nothing to do with politics;
- the armed forces should be subject to democratic control, and should respect the rights of civilians;
- the army should perform its proper role in all areas of civil–military relations; and
- the military should account for some of the country's stolen wealth. There were calls for inquiries into the activities of officers, especially those who had held political positions.

But each of these points spawned new questions. For instance, keeping the generals out of politics automatically raised the issue of how to involve them positively in peacetime duties. Placing the army under civilian control highlighted the task of re-educating the officer class in a way that would promote professionalism and a different understanding of civil–military relations. And establishing a harmonious relationship between the armed forces and the people mooted the challenge of how to encourage civil society to rethink its negative stereotype of the army.

2.1 Obasanjo and military reform

Rocky Williams has noted that, regardless of whether the armed forces have been in power for many years, or whether they simply enjoy a disproportionate level of influence within the Executive, a new government should initiate a fundamental

overhaul of how the military operates in a democracy.²³ Some of the important steps that Obasanjo has taken to reform the Nigerian armed forces are discussed below.

2.1.1 The appointment of new service chiefs

The first issue that Obasanjo confronted was the need to appoint four new service chiefs, after the fate of the former incumbents had resulted in a major controversy.²⁴ Abubakar had initially agreed to leave them in place, since they all held military posts, and, therefore, could not be made to resign with the Chief of General Staff, Michael Akhigbe, who held a political position. Two arguments were put forward to support this decision. First, if the incoming civilian government was to be stable and peaceful, then those individuals who understood the intricacies of the military set-up should remain as stabilising agents. The second argument focused on the need to maintain the dignity of the generals and not to give the impression that the military leadership was in disgrace or being rushed out of office. It was claimed that this could instill a sense of insecurity in the younger elements of the armed forces and possibly encourage a junior-officer coup – Sierra Leone serves as an instructive example of how much worse an uprising of this nature can be.

Other observers, however, argued that the service chiefs would act as a counter force to the Obasanjo administration and would prevent it from taking radical decisions to transform the military. They emphasised that Abacha, who had been left in office by Babangida, had overthrown Shonekan's interim government in November 1993. Indeed, the Nigerian weekly magazine, *The News*, captured this sentiment when it quoted a citizen as saying:

'... the last time they left us with one service chief, he brutalised us, now they want to leave us with four to kill us completely.'

The intrigue behind this decision largely centred on the former Chief of Army Staff, General Bamaiyi. His alleged role in 'setting up' Oladipo Diya as the key figure in the plot to overthrow Abacha had made him an extremely controversial figure in Nigeria. Many people believed that it would be dangerous to leave him in office, tasked with both defending the civilian government and helping to reform the military. In the end, all of the service chiefs were pressured into departing with the Abubakar administration.

Within hours of taking office, the new government appointed Rear Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi as Chief of Defence Staff and made Major General Victor Malu – the last and one of the most successful commanders of the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia – Chief of Army Staff. Rear Admiral Victor Ombu and Air Vice-Marshal Isaac Alfa were appointed as Chiefs of the Naval and Air Staff respectively. To the relief of the smaller ethnic groups, all of these officers come from minorities in the north and south of the country.

It is believed that these appointments were mostly made on merit, and that they were based on the report of a three-person committee – headed by the new Minister of Defence, General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma – which was completed before Obasanjo took power.²⁵ The new service chiefs have shown every indication of wanting to keep the military confined to barracks, but it is not known how effective they would be if the army became restless. In fact, General Malu has instructed members of the armed forces to ‘shoot’ any of their colleagues who announce a military coup.

2.1.2 Retirement of ‘political’ officers

The most important move taken so far to reform the Nigerian security sector is the retirement of about 100 senior military officers, including those who had held political offices in the Babangida and Abacha administrations. This decision was well received by both the people and military personnel. Civilians were happy because many of these officers, particularly those who had served as governors, were either controversial and/or corrupt. Those members of the armed forces who had not held political positions embraced the decision as consolation for their own inability to accumulate wealth on the basis of their positions.

The policy raised a number of important questions for security-sector reform:

- many people believed that Obasanjo could only take such a ‘drastic’ step because of his understanding of the military;
- this was a unilateral decision – taken by the President and some of his close associates – and thus gave the impression, at first, that Obasanjo had not yet divested himself completely of the autocratic style of military leadership; and
- there were calls for more dismissals, especially of the aides-de-camps to former political officers, who were alleged to be part of the old order.

The government stressed that the retirement exercise should serve as a warning to other officers that any future attempt to participate in politics would be at the expense of their professional careers.

2.1.3 Efforts to establish legislative oversight

One of the ways that the Obasanjo administration is trying to consolidate its position is by ensuring that the armed forces are subject to legislative monitoring. This initiative is being attempted through the Defence Committee of the National Assembly. Although this body existed under the First Republic (1960–66) and the Second Republic (1979–83), it was not strong enough to guarantee the required level of oversight. The new government is trying to correct this failing through general education efforts for Committee members. The Committee will approve

defence spending, procurement decisions and general budgetary issues. However, there are still a lot of improvements that need to be made, and it is not known how prepared legislators are to meet the challenges.

2.1.4 The 'new' Ministry of Defence

A major feature of Nigeria's Ministry of Defence is that a civilian Permanent Secretary has always handled day-to-day affairs, while the Minister of Defence has provided overall leadership. Despite successive military coups, this structure has remained in place, allowing civilian bureaucrats some input into defence policymaking. In practice, though, the Head of State and the four service chiefs have tended to overrule the Permanent Secretary. But the Ministry of Defence is now trying to create a better partnership between civilians and the armed forces. The military will make a greater contribution to matters relating to intelligence, operations and logistics, while civilians will play a more prominent role in policy formulation and defence spending. Although this objective has not yet been achieved, progress is being made in this direction.

As expected, General Danjuma – who was Chief of Army Staff when Obasanjo was Head of State in the 1970s – was made Minister of Defence. While this decision cannot be faulted on military grounds, especially given his experience, some analysts believe that a less controversial person should have been awarded the portfolio. They argue that the general's alleged business links with a variety of foreign companies,²⁶ and his cynical silence during Abacha's autocracy – even after Obasanjo and Yar'Adua had been arrested – are indicative of a politician who could put personal gain ahead of the national interest.

For the first few months of the current administration, the Ministry of Defence, which is supposed to handle security-sector-reform issues, was largely unproductive, mainly because of Danjuma's 'illness'. At one stage, a government spokesperson announced that he had resigned, but this was later denied, and he remains in office. The initial ineffectiveness of the ministry was made worse by the fact that Deputy Defence Minister, Mrs Dupe Adelaja – who managed departmental affairs while the general was sick – is not a member of the ruling PDP and does not have a military background. By September 1999, however, Danjuma had recovered enough to take effective control of the ministry, and there has since been a more coherent approach towards formulating policy. Danjuma has also made decisive statements on issues of national interest, such as on the trial of General Bamaïyi.²⁷

In December 1999, the ministry faced a major problem when a 420 million *naira* (\$4.9m) fraud scandal was uncovered, which led to the suspension of the Permanent Secretary, Dr Julius Makanjuola.

2.1.5 Foreign military consultants

Since August 1999, Military Professional Resources International (MPRI) has been assisting with the reformation of the Nigerian army. This US consultancy team is similar in some ways to the British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT), which helped with the modification of the Zimbabwean armed forces. The main difference between MPRI and BMATT is that the former mainly consists of retired officers and is not directly linked to its nation's military, although it is supported by the US government.

Since Nigeria's return to democracy, there has been an upsurge in foreign offers of assistance. The ostensible reason is to help the new government to check the activities of the military. But many Nigerians are suspicious of this sudden explosion of concern, and some believe that the US interest is a way of convincing Nigeria to join the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), thereby countering South Africa's decision not to participate in the scheme. So far, though, Nigeria remains opposed to the ACRI.

The involvement of MPRI has also raised a number of other issues:

- it is believed that MPRI was forced on Nigeria by the US Department of State, which is funding some aspects of the military-reform exercise;
- MPRI is undertaking this project without any cost to the Nigerian government, forcing many Nigerians to wonder what is the 'hidden catch';
- radical elements fear that this posture could compromise Nigeria's leadership role in Africa. Such groups have always seen Obasanjo as a 'lackey' of the US, citing the relationship that he had with America when he was Head of State in the 1970s, and his continuing personal friendship with former US President Jimmy Carter;
- even Conservative and moderate politicians are worried about the effect that the Abuja–Washington link will have on Nigeria's 'traditional' friends in Europe, especially Britain; and
- the undisturbed access that MPRI has enjoyed to all sections of the armed forces, including sensitive ones like intelligence and the Brigade of Guards, is viewed with concern in several circles.

The Nigerian Senate's proposal to establish an 'Anti-Coup Defence Pact' with the US – echoing the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement of the 1960s – provided another interesting dimension to this debate. Under the terms of the plan, the US would defend Nigeria's democracy if it suffered the threat of a military coup. However, the recommendation was widely condemned by the Nigerian public, and the Senate was forced to drop the idea.

2.1.6 Reducing the size of the army

The size of the Nigerian army has been a major issue since the end of the civil war, although successive governments have failed to give it the required attention. Prior to the latest transition, the Muhammed–Obasanjo administration had done the most to tackle the problem. Many people expected that, with Obasanjo as President and Danjuma as Defence Minister, it would be relatively easy to cut the armed forces from around 80,000 to approximately 50,000 personnel. However, government concerns about the socio-economic consequences of demobilising some 30,000 men have made the task much more difficult to achieve. The retirements will now be introduced in phases, but starting the process still poses a key problem for the government. Furthermore, reducing the size of the army is not just about numbers. Far more important, perhaps, are issues like proper identification of threats, and the state of preparedness of the armed forces.

2.2 Prosecuting the Abacha military machine

An important development in 1999 was the trials of some key individuals from the Abacha era. Two of the most prominent figures that have been arraigned before the courts are the former Chief of Army Staff, General Bamaiyi, and the former Chief Security Officer, Major Hamzat El Mustapha. Bamaiyi is charged with attempting to murder the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Chief Alex Ibru, and with trying to burn down Rutam House, the head office of *The Guardian* newspaper, which is owned by Ibru. Mustapha is also charged with the attempt on Ibru's life, and with the assassination on 4 June 1996 of Kudirat Abiola, the wife of the late Moshood Abiola – who died of a heart attack on 7 July 1998. Mohammed Abacha, the son of the late Sani Abacha, is also indicted with the murder of Kudirat Abiola. As of 26 January 2000, the cases are still in court, and it is believed that similar prosecutions will be brought before magistrates in the coming year.

The prosecutions have a number of consequences for security-sector reform.

- They have further demystified the military, and underscored criticisms about the ability of serving officers to hold positions of political leadership. The charges have also reinforced the suspicions of many Nigerians that the Abacha government was probably behind the mysterious assassinations of some prominent individuals.
- They have taken accountability in Nigeria to a new level. In the past, successive governments have been selective in the way that they have tried their predecessors. There were often probes into financial mismanagement, but this is the first time that former office holders have been charged with misusing power and abusing human rights. Whatever the outcome of the trials, it is believed that a precedent has been set regarding the administration of justice.

- Depending on the level of popularity that the accused men still enjoy in the army, the trials could result in an insurrection in the military. At the moment, there is no indication that this is going to happen, implying that the officers either have few sympathisers in the armed forces or that their supporters do not occupy sensitive positions.
- The cases have exposed how successive military leaders used the security and intelligence services to undermine the military institution.

2.3 *Civil–military relations*

In November 1997, a newspaper claimed that a group of soldiers had engaged in mass rape in Choba, a troubled community near Port Harcourt in the Niger Delta. Citizens were disturbed by the publication of photographs – allegedly taken undercover – which showed men in military uniform carrying out the violent act. The Senate immediately instigated a probe into the incident. A military spokesman denied the allegation, and countered that the pictures were stage-managed in order to discredit the military.²⁸ However, members of the Choba community insist that they have been victims of systematic rape and abuse by the armed forces.²⁹

The allegations – whether they are true or false – have a number of ramifications for security-sector reform:

- they are bound to deepen the animosity between civilians and the military, especially at a time when efforts are being made to build trust and mutual respect; and
- they reinforce the need for both constant dialogue between the armed forces and civilians, and mechanisms to address issues that might affect the two constituencies.

General Malu denied that his men had taken part in the rape incident, but did accuse members of the Amphibious Brigade in Port Harcourt of handing out their guns to youths and of fuelling ethnic riots in the Delta. Malu stated that most of the soldiers would now be transferred to other areas, denying them of any close association with the warring factions in the troubled Niger Delta.³⁰

But what seem to have resulted in the greatest criticism of the Obasanjo administration are the actions of the army in Odi in Bayelsa State. In December 1999, the military launched Operation *Hakiri* to quell the activities of militant *Ijaw* youths in the region. The mission, which was headed by Lieutenant Colonel H.A. Agbabiaka, was allegedly conducted with considerable brutality – as many as 300 people are reported to have been killed – much to the concern of the people and the members of the Senate who visited the area that same month.³¹

There is another dimension to the incident, which does not augur well for harmonious inter-group relations: Agbabiaka is a *Yoruba*, which reinforced the

popular impression that it is officers from this ethnic group who are generally sent to carry out military operations in the Niger Delta. Although the soldiers have been withdrawn, and Obasanjo has apologised for their behaviour, civil-society organisations want the accused men to be court marshalled.

2.4 The future of military reform

Reformation of the military is vital to any attempt to consolidate democracy and to gain an effective hold on the affairs of state. The October 1999 coup in Pakistan served as a vivid reminder that armed forces will always want to return to power if they have played a dominant role in their nation's political history. The new Nigerian administration appears to have got off to a fairly good start with changing the military, and most people believe that Obasanjo's former position as a commander has assisted him in this effort. It is debatable how successful some of the policies would have been had Falae been elected. Another advantage enjoyed by Obasanjo is that the army is completely discredited and officers fear the domestic and international reprisals of staging a political comeback. Furthermore, government efforts to recover some of the money looted by retired officers seem to have sent a message to members of the armed forces that the new dispensation is determined to reform the security sector.³²

However, much work still needs to be done to secure democratic supervision over the military institution in Nigeria. The country's economic problems have meant that many ordinary Nigerians have not yet experienced any significant improvement in their quality of life. In addition, many state governments are finding it difficult to cope with the financial difficulties that they have inherited from their predecessors. In some states, salaries have not been paid to public employees for five months.

This situation could create the kind of disaffection that the military has exploited in the past to destabilise governments. The decision to deregulate the oil sector has set the new administration on a collision course with workers. On 21 December 1999, some 5,000 employees invaded the Obasanjo residence, and nationwide strikes have been threatened if the government proceeds with its plans for the oil industry.³³

In addition, it is believed that there are still some officers loyal to the old order in the armed forces, who have the potential to sabotage the activities of the present administration.³⁴ The coup d'état in Côte d'Ivoire on 24 December 1999 illustrates the ease with which the military can intervene in politics, even in countries where no such precedent previously existed. Popular disgust for the armed forces can still transform into demands for their return if the civilian regime fails to deliver on issues of fundamental concern to the average citizen.

Chapter 2 Endnotes

²³ Williams, R., *Defence Restructuring in South Africa Between 1994–1999: Sharing Some Experiences with Nigeria*. Paper presented at the Conference on Democratic Control of the Military in Nigeria and South Africa, Ogere, Nigeria, November 1999.

²⁴ The service chiefs were General Ishaya Bamaïyi (Chief of Army Staff), Rear Admiral Jubril Ayinla (Chief of Naval Staff), Air Vice-Marshall Nsikak Eduok (Chief of Air Staff), and General Adamu Musa Daggash (Chief of Defence Staff).

²⁵ I would like to thank Kayode Fayemi for bringing this point to my attention.

²⁶ For more on Danjuma's business interests, see Fayemi, J. K., *Entrenched Military Interests and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria*. Paper presented at the International Conference on New Directions in Federalism, Abuja, Nigeria, March 1999.

²⁷ The minister said that the trial demonstrates to Nigerians that nobody is above the law under the new democratic dispensation.

²⁸ The Public Relations Officer for the Amphibious Brigade in Port Harcourt, Captain John Agim, made a spirited defence of the military. See *This Day*, 14 November 1999.

²⁹ See 'Choba's Uniformed Rapists', *The Guardian*, Lagos, 14 November 1999.

³⁰ *Newswatch*, 25 October 1999.

³¹ *Tell*, 13 December 1999.

³² Some former military governors now have to inform state panels of how they managed the economy. It is claimed that a few of them have agreed to pay back a proportion of the money that they looted.

³³ The rally in Abuja was the second demonstration organised by workers. An earlier one in Lagos took place without any problems. Workers believe that the planned deregulation will result in an increase in the oil price.

³⁴ *Tell*, 27 December 1999.

Chapter 3

The police and the judiciary³⁵

The Nigerian Police Force

It is now widely accepted that the traditional definition of national security – physical protection of the nation-state from external military attack – is too narrow. Equally important is the security of communities and individual citizens within them, which involves the provision of basic entitlements and the protection of human rights. This is the point at which the police and the judiciary fit into the governance and security-sector-reform equation.

At independence, Nigeria inherited a police force whose orientation had been defined and refined under colonial rule. The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) saw itself as a tool of government that was used to wage war against the people. As a result, it became a ready instrument in the hands of regimes wishing to coerce any perceived opposition. The introduction of the Republican Constitution of 1963 necessitated a shift of allegiance away from the British Crown towards the Nigerian President, and, during the early years of the republic, a number of constitutional changes influenced the organisation, deployment and control of the service. For example, the NPF came under the complete command of the political authorities, which were effectively responsible for appointing the Inspector General of Police and regional police commissioners. Indeed, constitutional statutes did not give the service sufficient protection from direct political pressure, and officers had to implement and act on politically motivated laws and orders, including those that could endanger the peace.

The police are granted wide powers of arrest: all that is required is ‘reasonable suspicion’ that an individual has committed, or is about to commit, a crime. There is hardly any protection for victims of police maltreatment, arising from the prejudice, subjectivity or malice that surfaces when an officer claims reasonable suspicion, even if evidence is lacking. Although these powers are supposed to deter crime, it is a well-known fact that there is widespread abuse. A fairly common feature of the Nigerian law-enforcement system, for example, is the practice of detaining relatives, friends, associates and even neighbours when the person in question cannot be located.

Broadly speaking, most of the constitutional powers granted to the NPF are the same as those guiding the activities of other police formations around the world. It is the interpretation of these provisions, and the nature of subsequent operations, which lead to abuse of power, and should be the target of reform.

3.1 The politics of policing

Nigeria has experienced a persistent problem with policing, which the political élite have been unwilling to address, largely because they are preoccupied with a narrow competition for power. People have become alienated from the government and the state, creating, in the process, an immense divide. Unable to carry the support of the population, civilian and military administrations have used the police and the security services to suppress protests, rebellions and other forms of discontent.

The introduction in the 1970s of paramilitary police units, especially the infamous Nigerian Mobile Police Force, widened the gulf between the government and the people. This unit was established when opposition to the state began to assume a militant dimension. Popular opposition to the harsh economic programmes that were pursued by successive administrations, particularly from 1986, resulted in urban unrest and rioting – instigated in several instances by students, who were joined by an army of jobless youths in the cities. Violent confrontations with the authorities reached epidemic proportions in the mid-1980s, following the accession of the Babangida regime and the introduction of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural-adjustment programme, which significantly reduced the average person's quality of life.

The NPF has never been neutral in politics. During the First Republic (1960–66), officers were willing agents in efforts to destroy opposition to the ruling party. Elections turned into full-scale civil wars, with the police helping to tie the hands of opponents – not always figuratively. Opposition candidates sometimes disappeared until the polls had been closed. During the Second Republic (1979–83), the activities of the police convinced many ordinary Nigerians that the majority of officers belonged to the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN). A number of state police commissioners saw themselves as alternative governors, particularly in areas not controlled by the NPN, and tried to determine the political future of these regions.

A clear example of police antipathy towards the public emerged in the run-up to the 1983 election. The then Inspector General of Police, Sunday Adewusi, appeared several times on national television in full combat uniform, warning the public not to invite massacres by protesting against the result. His threats were credible: as the poll approached, leave was cancelled for all officers, armoured tanks paraded down the streets, especially in states opposed to the NPN, and approximately 65,000 policemen were given paramilitary training and equipment for anti-riot duties. In fact, any visitor to Nigeria 'would have concluded that the country was preparing for war'.³⁶

3.2 Public perceptions and resources

In addition to the origins of the force and its constitutional powers, any reform programme must also take into consideration public perceptions, which have been

shaped by the brutal excesses of the past. Some examples of violent police behaviour are now etched into the collective memory of the people, such as:

- the Action Group crisis in Western Nigeria in 1962;
- the general-election quandary of 1964;
- the *Agbekoya* rebellion in Ibadan in 1964;
- the Western regional-election fracas of 1965;
- the various student uprisings, especially those of 1971, 1978 and 1986, in which scores of people lost their lives;
- the Bakolori Dam peasant revolt in 1980;
- the rampage in Kano in 1981;
- the anti-structural-adjustment-programme riots of 1988, 1989 and 1992; and
- the demonstrations, in June 1993 and June 1994, against the election annulment, resulting in the deaths of dozens of Nigerians.

In most cases, the police used much more than the required level of force to put down these protests.

To a significant extent, the effectiveness of the average police officer in maintaining public order and safety depends on his/her perceptions of role and responsibilities. Good quality training is, therefore, of the utmost importance. The type of individual being recruited into the service also affects performance and role awareness. For the most part, police work – particularly in the lower ranks – is considered to be the option of last resort for the barely literate and the unemployed. Some recruits have criminal records for petty theft and for acts of political thuggery, and many of them joined the NPF with an ingrained sense of low self-esteem, which fuels much of their abuse of power. Attendance at police training academies is considered to be a punishment posting, and corruption is rampant.

The solution to this set of problems will require raising entry qualifications and general literacy levels within the force, as well as providing better training and increasing the public standing of the institution. These measures will help the nation to view the police service as a vehicle for maintaining law and order and for preventing crime – all with the minimal application of force. At present, the average officer has an inadequate understanding of his/her role in society, the implications of power exploitation, and the notion of individual culpability.

Any evaluation of police performance must also acknowledge the extent to which the service has been denied resources. Compared to other military and security agencies – including the intelligence units – the police force was undoubtedly the worst funded body in Nigeria. The appearance of officers, usually in worn-out uniforms, would seem to confirm their low status within the security apparatus. They have little professional pride and suffer intense career frustration. Bad living and working conditions, poor pay, and wage arrears of several months are common, making officers vulnerable to bribery and other forms of corruption.

Another consequence of under-funding is inadequate logistics and equipment support, which are essential for effective policing. Every police station in the country is supposed to have at least one truck, jeep or similar vehicle, one station wagon, and one motorcycle. Most of these facilities, though, cannot meet the minimum prescribed standards. As a result, the police, even with the best of intentions, are unable to respond to distress calls. Communications hardware is either difficult to maintain, not in working order, or obsolete; robbers are usually better armed than police officers. Lack of resources, and poor levels of remuneration, should, therefore, be factored into a reform programme.

3.3 Obasanjo and police reform

There has been some movement on police reform since Obasanjo took office. Questionable promotions carried out by the Abubakar administration on the eve of its departure were reversed, and Musiliu Smith became the new Inspector General of Police. A Ministry of Police Affairs was established, and a retired army general, David Jemibewon, was given the portfolio. So far, the most radical move by the new ministry is the proposal to retire gradually some 50,000 police officers, consistent with the government's goal of 're-orientating the police force to cope with its constitutional role'.³⁷ Under this five-year plan, some 10,000 officers are to be laid off on an annual basis, while 25,000 will be recruited after proper training.

Jemibewon promised that the process would be properly coordinated so as to avoid any socio-economic ramifications, like an increase in armed violence. Retired members of the service will be provided with financial packages and vocational training. The outcome will depend not only on the instructions that the officers receive, but also on how they are treated by the government, socio-economic realities in the country, and how equipped they are to meet the challenge of incessant armed robbery, especially in Lagos. In addition to other incentives, the government has now given police officers 100m *naira* (\$1.2m) in loans for cars and motorcycles.

During a visit to the US in October 1999, Obasanjo discussed with President Bill Clinton the possibility of American assistance with police reform.³⁸ Jemibewon said that the trip had given him some new ideas, which he plans to introduce – although he did not provide any details.³⁹

A major decision that has been implemented since the transition is the restructuring of anti-crime squads, which were instituted by past military regimes. Such units include *Operation Sweep* in Lagos, created by the former state military administration of Brigadier Buba Marwa. These squads were effective when they were set up, but they had become corrupt and controversial – due to human-rights violations – by the time the military left power. The new civilian Governor of Lagos State, Ahmed Tinubu, renamed *Operation Sweep* the *Rapid Reaction Squad* (RRS). Unlike its predecessor, which was well-armed and staffed with military personnel, the RRS consists mainly of police units that are ill-equipped and unscrupulous – hence

the rise in armed robbery. Furthermore, the RRS was decentralised to the same status as local police units, subjecting it to the influence of corrupt divisional officers.

At present, the two main problems that confront the police are persistent armed robbery and militant ethno-nationalism. To tackle the former issue, the government decided in December 1999 to earmark 2.5 billion *naira* (\$29m) for pilot schemes in Lagos and Abuja.⁴⁰ Police patrol exercises have been introduced in both cities, while the number of federal highway patrol vehicles has been increased from 50 to 120.⁴¹ With regards to ethno-nationalist militant groups, the police are adopting a twin strategy of dialogue and force to ensure that public order is maintained. But the extent to which the strategy is proving successful is questionable.

Finally, it is worth noting that only civilian administrations have created Ministries of Police Affairs. This shows the special relationship that exists between civilian governments and the police – which both sides have come to cherish because of their common aversion to the armed forces.

The judiciary

Over the three decades of military rule, the Nigerian judiciary – like civil society – was oppressed continuously, and was unable to enjoy its independence. A common occurrence was the rejection of legal decisions by state and federal governments. Predictably, the situation became worse under Babangida and Abacha, when judges were bribed to make decisions in favour of the ruling administration. Some magistrates are widely known to have been corrupt. Five Supreme Court judges each received a Mercedes-Benz automobile from Babangida in circumstances that were not altogether clear. And, during the Abacha presidency, nine Supreme Court magistrates performed the functions of 15 judges. Successive military governments delayed decisions and changed the law to limit the influence of judges.

Like Abubakar – who appointed six judges to the Supreme Court and 24 to the Court of Appeal – Obasanjo has also taken some steps to reform the judiciary. A number of magistrates have been retired, while those still serving have been promised the freedom to exercise their duties. In an effort to correct old wrongs, the government appointed, on 4 June 1999, a Human Rights Investigation Commission, under the auspices of Justice Chukwudifu Oputa. At first, this body – which, in some ways, is similar to the South African Truth Commission – was uncertain about how to pursue its work. However, it now seems to have established a framework for operations, and is being inundated with memoranda, ranging from the substantive to the ridiculous. For instance, Oladipo Diya is demanding compensation of 300m *naira* (\$3.5m) for the personal ‘agony’ he apparently suffered after an alleged murder attempt at Abuja International Airport in December 1997.⁴² The mandate of the Commission is to investigate, but pro-democracy activists are now demanding ‘truth’ and ‘justice’.

3.4 Recent challenges

While the Obasanjo government was establishing itself in power and underlining its commitment to integrity, a scandal began to emerge over the ages and academic qualifications of new public-office holders. The controversy has two primary consequences for security-sector reform:

- it touches on the moral credibility of those individuals who are going to be taking security-related decisions. If they are dishonest and corrupt, the result could be a defective security sector, characteristic of the Babangida and Abacha years; and
- the decision to investigate the scandal is in the hands of the police and the judiciary, making them key actors in security-sector reform. But, as noted earlier, these two institutions have lost the respect of many Nigerians, and their future reputation will depend on how they respond to the new democratic dispensation, especially on issues concerning the élite class, which has tended to side-step legal criteria in the past.

Allegations were first levelled against the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Salisu Buhari, and then against the Senate President, Chief Evan Enwerem, and the Governor of Lagos State, Bola Tinubu. Aside from increasing his age from 25 to 38 so that he was eligible to contest the poll, Buhari claimed to have obtained a degree from the University of Toronto in Canada – an institution he never attended. Enwerem said that he had gone to a primary school that apparently never existed, and observers have also contested whether he went to Nigeria's oldest secondary school, CMS Lagos. Tinubu has been accused of declaring different ages at various stages, and for falsely claiming to have attended the Government College at Ibadan and the University of Chicago in the US.

Tinubu is holding on to his position, although his authority has been weakened; Enwerem was impeached in late November; and Buhari decided to confess, show remorse, and leave the House of Representatives – albeit after some initial bravado.⁴³ Buhari was tried and convicted by the Wuse Magistrate Court in Abuja on 3 August 1999, and was given the option of serving a two-month jail term or paying a 2,000 *naira* (\$23) fine. Of course, he chose the latter punishment. Many observers denounced the amount imposed by Justice Mohammed Kolo as absurd. However, the criminal record is symbolic, and it sends out an important message that the tide is turning in Nigeria.

3.5 Conclusion

The police and the judiciary suffered a great deal under the country's military dictatorships, and public respect for, and confidence in, both institutions had reached

a low point by the time Obasanjo took power. The new administration faces a huge task in reforming them to meet the democratic challenge. Domestic security, which, to a large extent, was managed in the past by members of the armed forces, now has to be the responsibility of the NPF.

It is unclear, though, how Obasanjo will handle the police and the judiciary. Under civilian administrations, the police have generally received better treatment, while the judiciary has tended to enjoy a freer hand. A lot will depend on how much the government is willing to spend, and how effectively this money is channelled towards useful ends.

Chapter 3 Endnotes

³⁵ I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Dr Sola Akinrinade to the section on the police.

³⁶ Falola, T., and Ihonvbere, J., *The Rise and fall of Nigeria's Second Republic, 1979-84*, (London: Zed Books, 1984), pp. 211-212.

³⁷ *This Day*, 5 September 1999.

³⁸ *The Guardian*, Lagos, 5 November 1999.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Abuja Trust*, 17-23 December 1999, p. 21.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² A device exploded just before Diya boarded a flight to take him to the funeral of another army general. He claimed that Abacha, working through his Chief Security Officer, Major Hamzat El Mustapha, had organised the assassination attempt.

⁴³ He initially refused to resign and hired Chief Rotimi Williams, a prominent Nigerian lawyer, to issue a libel suit against *The News*, which had made the allegation on 17 July 1999.

Chapter 4

Security threats and defence spending

Defence spending by African nations remains one of the most important aspects of governance, especially given the traditional lack of transparency and accountability in this area. Even in democratic African states, information about the security sector is rarely made public. This culture of secrecy – which, it must be noted, also existed in the West until the early 1980s – is based on the assumption that knowledge of defence expenditure can give an indication of a country's military preparedness. In recent years, however, there have been calls by international financial institutions for African nations to be more open about their defence budgeting and for the topic to be made part of the security-sector-reform agenda.

However, the inclusion of this subject in discussions on security-sector reform has become controversial. African states are not completely against greater openness, but they are opposed to donor agencies telling them how to behave. Some observers argue that defence is a sacred index of sovereignty, and that any form of external intervention is a subtle violation of national autonomy. Other analysts believe that the West's interest in defence spending and weapons procurement could be another way of acquiring contracts from developing countries. Alternatively, it is contended that appropriation of weapons of dubious military utility affects a nation's security outlook and prevents it from spending more money on economic development. During the 1990–91 Gulf War, for instance, Nigeria is reported to have received an additional \$572m from crude-oil sales – as a result of scarcity on the international market – but \$342m (60%) of this revenue was spent on security-related items, including \$298m on Mk 3 main-battle tanks.⁴⁴

4.1 External threats to the state

Nigerian governments have overplayed the threat of external attack to justify high levels of defence expenditure. The dangers have changed over time, but the four main countries of concern have been France, Libya, South Africa, and Cameroon.

Consecutive administrations (civilian and military) have viewed France as a security problem, believing that it would oppose any regional state powerful enough to dominate its former West African colonies. Paris attempted to destabilise Nigeria in the 1960s, for example, through its supply of arms to the 'Republic of Biafra'; the leader of the secessionists, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, was offered sanctuary in

Côte d'Ivoire after fleeing Nigeria in 1970. Since the end of the war, France has attempted to strengthen its relations with Nigeria. Considerable financial resources have been invested in the oil sector, and PSA Peugeot Citroën set up a major assembly plant at Kaduna. Bilateral relations continued to improve under Abacha, and the late dictator made French the country's second official language. As a result of the chill in relations with Britain, the Nigerian High Commission in London was 'down-graded' and the Nigerian Embassy in Paris became more important.

The threat from Libya was dominant in the early 1980s, when Colonel Moamar Gadaffi was allegedly exporting his own brand of radical nationalism across the continent. Nigeria was considered conservative, and thus became an important target for the Libyan leader. Shagari's civilian administration was concerned that Gadaffi could provoke secular and religious disaffection among Nigeria's youth. Over the past decade, however, the danger has elapsed, and Gadaffi no longer appears to champion an agenda based on regional hegemony.

Much the same applies to South Africa. During the apartheid era, Nigeria was at the forefront of international condemnation against Pretoria.⁴⁵ Of course, this situation changed in the 1990s, although subtle rivalries still exist over continental leadership.

The only major external threat currently facing Nigeria comes from Cameroon.⁴⁶ The two states are locked in a low-intensity war over the Bakassi Peninsula, which has persisted since the late 1970s, but has become more serious over the past five years. This 400-square-mile cape juts into the Gulf of Guinea (where their borders meet), and is rich with fish and presumed oil reserves. On 29 March 1994, Cameroon took the matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. However, Nigeria maintains that the ICJ has no jurisdiction in the matter and that the claims of Cameroon are not admissible. A ruling on the dispute is not expected for several years.

4.2 Domestic security problems

By contrast, Nigeria's internal security problems are more complex, and have been aggravated by the government's poor management of local conflicts. The key domestic threats are discussed below.

4.2.1 The rise of violent ethno-nationalism

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the most serious problem confronting the Nigerian state is the rise of violent ethno-nationalism. Between November and December 1999 alone, several hundred people were killed during these struggles, leading Obasanjo to instruct the police to shoot on sight members of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC).⁴⁷ It is impossible to know the exact number of groups

involved in these uprisings, but the key organisations include the OPC, the Ijaw Youth Movement – which has a military wing known as the Egbesu Boys⁴⁸ – the Ibo People’s Congress, and the Arewa People’s Congress. In recent months, the OPC, the Arewa People’s Congress, and the Ijaw Youth Movement have been the most prominent organisations.

The increase in ethno-nationalist conflicts has the following consequences for security-sector reform:

- the government could use the issue to justify a clamp down on the population, denying fundamental human rights, and thereby returning to the dark days of military dictatorship. The administration has already threatened to declare a state of emergency in states that cannot maintain peace;
- the administration could claim that it needs to acquire weapons in order to quell domestic revolts. This could increase the budget for defence and reduce expenditure on social amenities;
- the government’s management of the crises has widened the gap between the administration and the people. Obasanjo’s instruction that the police should shoot on sight members of the OPC has been widely condemned by human-rights activists;⁴⁹
- members of these movements are believed to have powerful backers in the country, and retired military officers are now becoming involved in their activities; and
- the leaders of these organisations could become ‘warlords’ in the future, and possibly throw West Africa into another era of instability.

4.2.2 Religious riots

Religious riots have been a recurring issue in Nigeria since the late 1970s. Contrary to popular opinion, they have not always involved Christians and Muslims, but have also flared up between different Muslim denominations. The first time that the Nigerian government appreciated their security implications was during the *Maitatsine* riots in Kano State in December 1980. The disorder escalated into a full-scale counter insurgency, with armoured tanks and other sophisticated weapons being used to dislodge members of the *Muhammadu Marwa* sect. Overall, some 5,000 people were killed in the disturbances. There have been a number of subsequent religious riots, mostly in northern Nigeria. This is a growing problem for the federal administration, which must be addressed through greater respect for pluralism.

In Kaduna State, the activities of Sheik Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky, the leader of the Shiite sect in Nigeria (allegedly funded by Iran), and his supporters have taken religious militancy to a frightening level. In Edo State, the Christian Pentecostal movement attempted a ‘face-off’ with a local, traditional institution, represented by the Oba of Benin, but the incident was resolved before it could escalate into violence.

In 1998, religious fanatics went on the rampage in Lagos. And the most recent case of violent religious activity occurred in December 1999, when Muslim youths burnt down churches in Ilorin in Kwara State. What is now considered more disturbing, though, is that religious fanaticism has penetrated the country's university system.⁵⁰

The possibility of religious riots has been heightened by the Zamfara State government's decision of October 1999 to adopt *Sharia* law. Other states in the northern part of the country are also contemplating a similar move, while Cross Rivers State has threatened to declare itself a 'Christian State'. The Zamfara State announcement remains the most serious threat to the secularity of the Nigerian state, and its implications for national security are immense.

- First, non-Muslims in the state are already feeling unsafe and are moving to other parts of the nation.
- Second, implementation of *Sharia* law will require a special enforcement procedure. The national police force has confirmed that it will not uphold the law, which may mark the beginning of regional policing in the country. The Zamfara State judiciary will also have to undergo special training in order to incorporate *Sharia* into the legal framework.
- Third, the State's determination to proceed with the adoption of *Sharia* law, despite federal protestations that the decision is illegal, is a dangerous precedent. The move is likely to affect the relationship between the central and state governments.
- Fourth, other sections of the nation believe that there are more sinister motives behind the *Sharia* declaration. Some observers contend that this is the first step towards the disintegration of the country, and that the decision is intended to frustrate the efforts of the incumbent President because he does not belong to the *Hausa-Fulani*.

4.2.3 Ethnic clashes and resource-based conflicts

Inter- and intra-ethnic disputes are continuing all over the country. The most serious communal clashes are between *Ifes* and *Modakekes* in Osun State, *Katafs* and *Hausas* in Zangon Kataf in Kaduna State, *Junkuns* and *Kutebs* in Taraba State, *Umuleris* and *Aguleris* in Anambra State, and *Hausas* and *Yorubas* in Shagamu and Kano. Structural-adjustment programmes, the declining economic fortunes of many communities, and the growing availability of light weapons have exacerbated these and other crises. The response of the central government has not always been helpful, and no attempt has been made to tackle the root causes of the violence. Recommendations suggested by the various commissions that have been set up are often ignored.

For the past decade, resource-based conflicts have posed the greatest internal security threat to the nation. The oil-producing communities are engaged in bitter

disputes among themselves, and with the federal administration (via the oil companies) over compensation for environmental damage caused by foreign multinationals, especially the Royal Dutch/Shell Group. Between 1988 and 1997, for instance, the company recorded 180 acts of sabotage against its installations in the Niger Delta, mainly by disaffected youth groups, and suffered crude-oil production losses of 3,750m barrels in 1994, 1,005m in 1996, and 1,883m up to May 1997. Despite a strong response from the government, grassroots activity in the Delta has made the region virtually ungovernable. The challenge to the activities of the oil companies, and the demand for community control over oil proceeds, strike at the basis on which Nigeria's centre-centric federalism has been constructed by the military.

4.2.4 The spread of 'cultism'

The spread of 'cultism' in Nigerian universities has been a persistent concern, but it gained unprecedented attention in July 1999. Members of an unidentified cult invaded dormitories at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Osun State, killing seven students. A judicial commission of inquiry is still investigating the incident, and the federal government has banned all secret organisations in tertiary institutions. But given that armed gangs and cults have also penetrated the country's secondary-school system, it is unclear how effective this restriction will be.

4.3 Key characteristics of defence expenditure

Nigerian defence spending has three dominant characteristics.

- First, the level and direction of expenditure has never reflected the true nature of external threats to the state. Money has been used to keep incumbent regimes in power and to acquire weapons of questionable relevance, rather than to address social-welfare issues. As Kayode Fayemi noted:

The concentration on espionage, sabotage and subversion by insecure regimes ... was crucial to the government's inability to solve mounting economic ... problems. While it is arguable that certain regimes did face the threat of ouster most of the time, it was a mental defence mechanism to pre-empt any opposition by people excluded from [the] political process ... élites' conceptualisation of security had often been based on an interpretation of defence planning as mainly weapons procurement, [the] size of [the] armed forces, payment of salaries and self-defence.⁵¹

- Second, the government has used the threat of external attack to justify purchasing military hardware, such as light tanks and helicopters. These

weapons, however, were used to suppress the domestic opposition. Indeed, arms are often acquired in anticipation of a national crisis. Shortly before the 1983 general election, for example, the administration increased its arms purchases to counter an envisaged rebellion against the attempt to manipulate a second-term victory for the ruling party.

- Third, defence expenditure has provided a way for top military officers and senior civil servants in the Ministry of Defence to earn substantial commissions. There are numerous examples of corruption, but one of the worst cases involved the US-based Lockheed (now Lockheed Martin) Corporation. In 1980, the American current-affairs magazine, *Newsweek*, reported that senior army officers had been offered a \$3m bribe to secure some procurement transactions. The military officials were not penalised for their misdemeanour, reinforcing the impression that accepting inducements from foreign defence contractors was a risk-free endeavour.

More recently, weapons purchases for ECOMOG have provided the best opportunity for 'rent seeking'. Nigeria's contribution to the peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone costs the government approximately \$1m per day – according to Abacha some \$3bn was also spent on the mission in Liberia, although Obasanjo claims that the figure was around \$8bn – placing a further strain on the country's weak economy.

Nigeria has always been vulnerable to inducements from international arms merchants. Almost 20 years ago, Abubakar – when he was just a colonel in the army – summed up the impact of this pressure on national procurement policy:

It is quite a sight at the Ministry of Defence on any working day to see the number of foreign and Nigerian arms and defence related dealers who flock the complex. They all arrive carrying briefcases containing catalogues of all sorts of defence equipment ranging from rain caps to the latest destroyers and bombers. They gain access to all officers who have any influence on what equipment is to be purchased ... Invitations are extended to headquarters staff and military officers to attend military trade fairs and arms bazaars ... where the choicest hotel accommodation is made available to participants, all in a bid to influence decisions. The industries add all such expenses to the cost of equipment sold, and they put forward the best reasons why developing countries need the equipment and staff are carried away by the smooth-talking merchants.^{3 52}

4.4 *The future of defence spending*

Obasanjo delivered his first budget to the National Assembly on 24 November 1999, and, as expected, the Ministry of Defence received the second highest budgetary allocation of 34.1bn *naira* (\$396m) – the Department of Education received 40.3bn

naira (\$468m). The Ministry of Police Affairs was awarded 27.9bn *naira* (\$324m). The high consideration given to defence is not particularly surprising, given the cost of the efforts to reduce the strength of the armed forces.

It is difficult to determine the future of defence spending in Nigeria, but it is likely that internal security issues will begin to attract greater attention, particularly the question of equipping the police so that they can tackle the problem of rising armed robbery. The democratic dispensation will probably make procurement policy more open, and allow civil society and the legislature greater input into the process. The population is now far more articulate and informed than ever before, and will challenge inappropriate acquisitions. Furthermore, Obasanjo is likely to be strong in his determination to curb rent seeking by members of the military and defence civil servants; his knowledge of the operational workings of the Ministry of Defence will assist him in this effort.

Sub-regional developments – including the signing on 7 July 1999 of the Lomé Peace Agreement between the warring parties in Sierra Leone – will probably eliminate some sources of external spending. But Nigerians are anxious to know whether future political instability in West Africa will escalate to a level that will necessitate the country's deeper involvement in regional affairs, which, in the past, has had a crucial effect on security-sector politics at home.

Chapter 4 Endnotes

⁴⁴ Olonisakin, F., 'Conventional Arms Control in Sub-Saharan Africa: Problems and Prospects', *Bulletin of Arms Control*, No. 36, September 1999, p. 17.

⁴⁵ In fact, Nigeria was made an honorary member of the Front-Line States.

⁴⁶ Chadian rebel attacks on the north-eastern states of Nigeria also continue to pose a threat to the country.

⁴⁷ *National Concord*, 26 November 1999.

⁴⁸ Egbesu is the *Ijaw* god of war.

⁴⁹ Among those who have condemned the instruction are the Nobel Laureate for Literature, Wole Soyinka, and Femi Falana. See *Tell*, 13 December 1999.

⁵⁰ Bisi Olawunmi, 'How to disarm Communal Warlords', *Sunday Concord*, 6 June 1999, p. 4.

⁵¹ Olonisakin, F., *op.cit.*, September 1999, p. 15.

⁵² Fayemi, J.K., *Threats, Military Expenditure and National Security: Analysis of Trends in Nigeria's Defence Planning, 1970–1990*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of London, 1994, p. 251.

Chapter 5

Regional security and security-sector reform

There is a connection between Nigeria's role in regional diplomacy and its domestic security-sector-reform agenda. In the 1990s, this link manifested itself forcefully when the country became militarily engaged in the civil wars of its close neighbours, Liberia and Sierra Leone. As the largest and most powerful state in West Africa, Nigeria has always taken a considerable interest in the region's affairs.⁵³ Indeed, the country's enduring commitment to regional hegemony was the main motivation behind its deep involvement in the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on 28 May 1975.⁵⁴ Although this policy has sometimes been contradictory – as illustrated by the Shagari government's decision to expel all 'illegal aliens' in 1980 – the attention has been constant.

In addition, there is also a significant, direct security dimension to Nigeria's involvement in regional matters.

- Given the past rivalry between former British and French colonies in West Africa, Nigeria has always viewed its Francophone neighbours with concern.⁵⁵
- By the end of the civil war in January 1970, Nigeria had realised the geopolitical importance of peace in West Africa, and the need to keep a watchful eye on other regional powers. The only bomb to explode in Lagos during the three-year conflict, for example, was allegedly manufactured in the former Rhodesia. And, in the early 1970s, South Africa took a special interest in, and offered assistance to, Equatorial Guinea, which is less than 30 minutes by air from Nigeria's border.
- Abuja fears the domestic ramifications of an influx of refugees, resulting from instability in the region. During the civil war in Chad in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government tried with little success to monitor its frontiers in order to stop displaced people from seeking refuge in Nigeria.

On 24 December 1989, all of these concerns were combined when civil war erupted in Liberia. Nigeria promptly assumed the leadership of the ECOMOG peacekeeping mission, which was deployed by ECOWAS on 24 August 1990 to try and deal with the first real example of state collapse in West Africa. In March 1991, Sierra Leone also began its descent into violence, and Nigeria was forced to become involved in that country's affairs, too.

5.1 Nigeria in Liberia and Sierra Leone

Nigeria's engagement in Liberia and Sierra Leone is the focus of many studies,⁵⁶ but only those events that have a bearing on the country's security-sector-reform agenda will be examined in this monograph. First, it was suspected that Babangida was motivated to intervene primarily by the need to help beleaguered Liberian President Samuel Doe, rather than by a desire to protect regional peace and stability. Indeed, Babangida provided his Liberian counterpart and close personal friend with weapons. Although this exchange took place before Nigeria had made a major commitment to ECOMOG, it nevertheless resulted in the neutrality of the force being called into question. Second, ECOWAS was split over its approach to Liberia: some members of the organisation interpreted the formation and deployment of ECOMOG as an attempt by Nigeria to impose its will on neighbouring states. The government failed to ward off these allegations, and, as a result, the strong political and military resolve that it displayed over the next seven years to try to end the fighting was compromised by intense controversy.

Nigeria's involvement in Liberia illustrates the connection between regional military commitments and the intricate politics of its security sector.

- The decision to dispatch troops was taken hastily by Babangida and the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), without consideration of the national mood for external engagement. The majority of the population only learned about the mission after the force had been deployed, underscoring the country's fundamental problems with decision-making and governance.
- Many people believed that Babangida wanted to keep the military preoccupied in order to forestall a potential military coup. On 22 April 1990, Major Gideon Orkar led an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Babangida⁵⁷ – as noted above, ECOMOG was sent to Liberia on 24 August 1990.
- After Nigeria assumed the leadership of ECOMOG, the appointment of field commanders became inextricably tied to the internal politics of the military. All of these officers – with the exception of General Malu – were controversially retired from the armed forces not long after their tour of duty in Liberia.
- By far the most important link, though, concerned budgetary allocations to ECOMOG – which finally withdrew from Liberia on 2 February 1998. It is impossible to know exactly how much money Nigeria spent on the mission: as noted in chapter four, Abacha claimed that the cost was around \$3bn, but both Nigerian defence analysts and Obasanjo consider this figure to be a substantial underestimate. Throughout the operation, the government refused to subject itself to any form of transparency or accountability. In addition, the mission became a great opportunity for rent seeking – a handful of millionaires (military personnel and civilian contractors) are believed to have been created almost overnight.

By the time elections were held in Liberia on 19 July 1997, many Nigerians had become more interested in, and critical of, the political economy of regional involvement. Nonetheless, another full-scale engagement was looming in Sierra Leone.

Contrary to popular assumption, Nigeria's military ties with Sierra Leone date back to the Babangida regime. But the country's deep embroilment only became obvious under the Abacha administration. Nigeria intervened in Sierra Leone for a number of reasons.

- First, the government believed that the civil war was due to the involvement of the Sierra Leonean army in the Liberian peacekeeping mission. Given that Nigeria had endorsed and encouraged its participation, it felt partially responsible for the conflict in Sierra Leone.
- Second, Sierra Leone is also a member of the Commonwealth – it gained its independence from Britain on 27 April 1961 – and has a long historical attachment to Nigeria. Many of Nigeria's first-generation leaders attended the famous Forah Bay College in Freetown, where strong peer-group ties were established. In addition, many Sierra Leoneans have links with the people of the Nigerian coastal states, which date back to the pre-colonial period.⁵⁸
- Third, under the terms of a controversial defence agreement, Nigeria was obliged to come to the assistance of Sierra Leone if it was called on to do so. The legality of this pact, and the extent to which it could be used to justify Nigeria's involvement in the country, were questioned during the course of the eight-year war. Many observers argued that the accord was invalid because it had never been ratified by Sierra Leone's parliament.

The most controversial theories to explain Nigeria's intervention in Sierra Leone, however, had nothing to do with altruism and kinship:

- it is alleged that Abacha was determined to make a fortune from Sierra Leone's diamond deposits;⁵⁹
- Abacha calculated that the mission would earn Nigeria a reprieve from the Commonwealth, which had suspended its membership on 11 November 1995 for consistent human-rights violations;⁶⁰ and
- Abacha apparently wanted the region to be run by leaders, especially from fellow Commonwealth nations, who would support his self-succession campaign. He had the backing of Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, while Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings had indicated his tacit support. Consequently, Sierra Leone President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was the next regional leader to be courted. Inducements allegedly took the form of money and oil concessions.⁶¹

The Sierra Leone mission also has profound consequences for the Nigerian security sector, and, potentially, for any reform programme.

- As in Liberia, the operation was designed to keep the armed forces busy, and to prevent them from threatening the regime.
- It highlighted the dangers of committing the national army to a defence pact without the necessary domestic political debate, consensus and support.
- Lack of adequate briefings encouraged the press to make unsubstantiated speculations about casualty figures.
- The cost of engagement was far higher than in Liberia, where the UN and other West African states helped to underwrite the financial burden.

5.2 The transition and regional politics

Nigeria's military engagement in Liberia and Sierra Leone was a crucial issue in the politics of the transition programme for three related reasons. First, there was strong domestic opposition to the financial cost – as noted earlier, Nigeria was spending around \$1m per day in Sierra Leone. All of the major pressure groups in Nigeria argued that these resources could, and should, be used to greater effect at home. Second, there were strong hints of political bankruptcy in the government's position of intervening to protect democracy in the region, while doing its best to stifle pluralism at home. Third, Nigerian soldiers were growing tired of what seemed to be an open-ended commitment in Sierra Leone. Some regulars had spent more than seven years in Liberia, fighting a war of questionable national interest. Many of these recruits were then sent straight to Sierra Leone, which meant that they had not spent time with their families for some years. And to compound further their hardship, military wages were paid irregularly.

Shortly after taking office, Abubakar decided to discontinue the operation, and plans were drawn up to withdraw the country's forces. However, the policy was reversed when the rebel Revolutionary United Front launched a sudden attack in December 1998 on Freetown, which was supposed to be under the protection of ECOMOG. Instead, the Nigerian government made a stronger military commitment in order to preserve its image, as well as to safeguard lives and property.

During the presidential campaign, Falae and Obasanjo put forward their policy positions on Sierra Leone. Falae stated categorically that he would recall the 'peacekeepers' within one year, and stressed that Nigeria's involvement was not conducive to meaningful negotiation. What is often overlooked in his declaration is that he intended to give the warring parties the opportunity to reach a settlement, which the Nigerian government would help to facilitate. By contrast, Obasanjo was tactically ambiguous. Although he admitted that the operation was a waste of national resources, the PDP leader did not indicate any specific plans to withdraw the troops. Aside from the fact that the mission was domestically unpopular, Obasanjo had to be careful not to be seen to be treading the path of his military predecessors, and, at the same time, avoid antagonising those with a vested economic interest in the operation.

The positions of the two candidates were viewed with concern in Sierra Leone. As a result, Kabbah travelled to Lagos to consult with his Nigerian counterpart as soon as the election was decided. Obasanjo promised to maintain the country's presence in Sierra Leone until a peaceful settlement was reached. He reconfirmed this stance after an appeal from British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who met with the new President on 10 March 1999.

5.3 Obasanjo and regional diplomacy

Since the transition, Nigeria's involvement in Sierra Leone has been well managed, and has demonstrated that democratic change can make a difference in foreign policy. Even before he officially took power, Obasanjo visited a number of countries in West Africa to discuss the question of regional stability.⁶² In addition, the appointment of General Malu as Chief of Army Staff may have helped him to appreciate the complex regional dimensions of the war in Sierra Leone. All of these factors paved the way for the signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement.

Nigeria has now started to pull its troops out of the country. However, under the terms of a new arrangement reached with the UN, Nigeria is to provide some soldiers to help with disarmament and demobilisation. In acknowledgement of the important role played by Abuja in resolving the crisis, a senior Nigerian diplomat, Olu Adeniji, has been made the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative in Sierra Leone. Moreover, the end of the war means that Nigeria will be able to devote its attention to domestic military reorganisation, and to end what has become, perhaps, the most expensive regional-diplomacy agenda since the country gained its independence almost 40 years ago.

At the last ECOWAS Summit in December 1999, Obasanjo called for a closer working relationship among members, and for an end to the Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone divisions. Nigeria seems to be taking a leading step in this direction. Adekeye Adebajo noted that a new relationship seemed to be unfolding with Côte d'Ivoire before the 24 December 1999 coup; Obasanjo's current Chief of Protocol, J. Coker, was, until recently, Nigeria's long serving Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire.⁶³ Also, for the first time, a Minister of State for African Integration and Cooperation, Professor Jerry Ghana, has been appointed to the Executive.

The military coup in Côte d'Ivoire, however, has turned the clock back for the region. This is not likely to have any direct impact on Nigeria, since Abuja is unlikely to commit troops to the country – although it is believed that ousted Ivorian President Henri Konan Bedie may have made such a request.⁶⁴ However, Nigeria will probably play a leading role in ensuring that Côte d'Ivoire moves back into the democratic fold.

ECOWAS countries have also taken a significant step towards regional stability with the signing, in December 1999, of a protocol to establish a mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. The document provides for a

ten-member Security and Mediation Council,⁶⁵ a Defence Council, a Council of Elders, stand-by military units for peacekeeping operations, and information centres in Banjul, Cotonou, Monrovia and Ouagadougou.⁶⁶

In the years ahead, it is likely that Obasanjo's elder-statesman image and the country's economic resources will help to increase the respect of other West African countries for Nigerian involvement in those internal disputes that have regional ramifications. An effective regional policy – devoid of any hidden motivation – will allow Nigeria to discharge its assumed responsibilities as the sub-regional leader. Developments in West Africa are also likely to remain key issues in Nigeria's security-sector-reform programme, but the focus will probably centre increasingly on diplomatic negotiation, rather than military intervention. The Nigerian economy cannot shoulder the kind of adventurous foreign policies that were pursued by Babangida and Abacha. This new approach to regional relations has already begun to yield dividends, as witnessed by Nigeria's role in the Lomé peace process.

Chapter 5 Endnotes

⁵³ See Aluko, O., *Essays on Nigerian Foreign Policy*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).

⁵⁴ Gowon spearheaded the formation of ECOWAS, despite opposition from France. See Olaniyan, O., 'Nigeria and ECOWAS: Role and Problem Analysis', in Olusanya, G., and Akindele, R., *Nigeria's External Relations: The First Twenty-Five Years*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1986), pp. 126–140.

⁵⁵ See Nwokedi, E., 'Nigeria and France', in Olusanya, G., and Akindele, R., op. cit., pp. 284–293.

⁵⁶ Among other works, see Alao, A., *The Burden of Collective Goodwill: The International Involvement in the Liberian Civil War*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 1998).

⁵⁷ The coup attempt broke the sense of invincibility that surrounded Babangida. Although the coup failed, the plotters succeeded in getting to Dodan Barracks, Nigeria's former seat of government.

⁵⁸ Some of these links are illustrated in Cole, A., *Kossob Town Boy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

⁵⁹ See Alao, A., 'Diamonds are Forever ... but so also are Controversies', *Journal of Civil Wars*, Vol. 2. No. 3., Autumn 1999. Following the death of Abacha in June 1998, his family had to return some of the money that had been looted from the treasury. So far, more than \$100m has been returned, but several hundred million dollars is still unaccounted for.

⁶⁰ The suspension decision was taken at the Commonwealth conference in New Zealand, following the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa and a number of other activists, despite international appeals for clemency.

⁶¹ The money that Abacha allegedly gave to Jerry Rawlings spawned considerable controversy after the death of the dictator, and caused enormous embarrassment to the Ghanaian President.

⁶² Nigeria's new government, together with other regional states and the UN, has committed itself to the path of peace.

⁶³ Adekeye, A., 'Once a Talk Shop', *Till*, 27 December 1999, p. 27.

⁶⁴ President Bedie visited Obasanjo a few days after the coup. See *The News*, 10 January 2000, p. 39.

⁶⁵ The ten members are Nigeria, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Senegal and Togo.

⁶⁶ These centres will serve as an early-warning mechanism. See Adebajo, A., op. cit., p. 28.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

With the Obasanjo administration almost three-quarters of the way through its first year in office, there is still a lot to be done to restructure the Nigerian security sector. Although some changes have been introduced, including the removal of key individuals from sensitive security positions, and the elimination of certain structures belonging to the old order, the reforms have yet to satisfy the aspirations of most Nigerians. The new President has enjoyed the considerable goodwill of many citizens; the initial lack of support from fellow *Yorubas* in the south-west was quickly addressed with the launch of a prodigious ethno-patriotic drive, emphasising that the electoral victory was a 'chance' for them, too. At the national level, little pressure was put on the civilian government because the majority of the population appreciated that, after almost one-and-a-half decades of military rule, the new government needed time to consolidate its position. By the end of 1999, though, this 'understanding' seemed to have ended, and the people had become more restless in their demands.

Efforts to reform the army have focused on containment and trying to instill democratic ideas into the minds of serving officers. In coming years, the focus of security-sector reform is likely to remain on the armed forces, especially as they define their role in the new democratic scheme. And it is in the interest of stable civil-military relations to try to engage the army and civil society in constant dialogue. This is already happening, but not at the insistence of the government.⁶⁷

The new administration has devoted significant attention to keeping the military out of politics, but at the expense of other important security matters, such as the management of relations between the country's disparate ethnic groups and resource-based conflicts. All of these neglected issues are now starting to dominate the attention of the government and to threaten the structure of the Nigerian state. It is almost certain that the country will spend the coming year trying to address the problems of ethno-nationalism and instability in the Niger Delta. In some parts of the nation, the former issue may assume a religious dimension or become more violent as a result of the depressing economic climate.

This leads to the crucial question of whether the new constitution is capable of meeting the challenge of security-sector reform in Nigeria. As noted earlier, the democratic transition was undertaken without a new constitution. Although one was signed into law just prior to Obasanjo's accession in May 1999, there was little public participation in the process, and the effectiveness of the document is already being called into question. In fact, the National Assembly and the Executive have both set up parallel Constitutional Review Committees. So far, the Obasanjo administration

has not shown any inclination towards developing a more participatory constitution. Pro-democracy groups have rejected the current constitution, but they are cooperating with the Review Committees to try to influence the outcome.⁶⁸

As noted in the last chapter, regional developments are also starting to favour security-sector reform. Once a semblance of order has been re-established it is expected that Nigeria will engage in periodic confidence-building initiatives to safeguard peace and stability. It is also possible that Obasanjo will revive some of the diplomatic structures that were used to manage West African conflicts in the late 1970s (when he was last in office) – for instance, the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs served as a government think-tank. But there are no guarantees that the money saved from regional military missions will be earmarked for development.

The future of good governance and reliable security-sector reform in Nigeria seem to depend on a number of interwoven factors, including:

- the creation of a revised constitution that addresses the complex nature of relations between the country's myriad ethnic groups;
- the curbing of corruption, and the need for the military to respect civilian control; and
- the development of a credible and active civil society. Although the government has done little to encourage its maturity, there continues to be significant progress towards the evolution of an articulate civil society. The media, in particular, plays an important role: the press made all of the allegations against the new public-office holders mentioned in chapter three.

The wider international community also has a major role to play in the establishment of durable security-sector reform in Nigeria, and, indeed, in other African states. The obvious link between poverty and conflict has shown the need for actors like the IMF, the World Bank, and Western governments to take the debt problems of African countries more seriously. There is a need to go beyond selective debt forgiveness – as Britain did in December 1999 – if the advertised commitment of these actors to security-sector reform in Africa is to be taken seriously. It needs to be emphasised that goodwill should not just be political, or narrowed down to the military. Perhaps more important is the human-security dimension, which requires that Western governments take an interest in the economic development of these states. This is particularly the case for Nigeria.

On the whole, many people believe that the democratisation of Nigeria will be a long process, and that the transition should be seen as the starting point. But the country's rich pool of human and natural resources offers the chance to establish a strong and credible state over the next ten years. Nigeria is often described as a country where, although the best may be impossible to achieve, the worst rarely happens. It remains to be seen whether there is sufficient political will to realise the country's potential.

Chapter 6 Endnotes

⁶⁷The Centre for Democracy and Development and the African Strategic and Peace Research Group have both initiated dialogue between civil society and the military.

⁶⁸Meanwhile, in October 1999, a coalition of non-governmental organisations, academics, and civil-society groups formed a Citizen Coalition for Constitutional Reform. The group adopted a twin-track approach of reforming the current constitution, while writing a democratic constitution.