

## Chris Ali and the Rationality of Military Rules in Nigeria

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**Abstract.** An undeniable factor in the history of Nigeria is the intervention of the military class with governance. While some scholars justify this, others see it as an aberration that must be permanently rooted out. Scholars of Plato's persuasion radically dismissed the rationality of military rule, but an intense study of the Africa political situation shows that military involvement in politics is compulsory particularly in a polity like Nigeria.

This paper explores the problem with democracy in Nigeria and defined the role of military in line with Chris Allis short span and corrective ideology

### 1. Introduction

Military intervention in politics is one of the defining features of plethore governance in Africa. In fact, nations like Nigeria witnessed politics of coups that were justified as rescue and corrective mission. It is however absurd that the rescuers in most cases perpetrated even more perfidious acts than the ousted politicians. Corruption, assassination, violation of rights, prebendalism etc are associated with military rule. One may then be tempted to regard military intervention in politics as a meaningless and useless enterprise. But, with a keen insight into the Nigeria's situation Chris Ali, enunciates that when situation calls for, the action must be short and sharp thus, this essay is a philosophical re-appraisal of Chris Ali's idea on military intervention in Nigeria's politics.

### 2. Analysis of Concepts

The idea of politics is subject to diverse interpretation. An ordinary analyst who preview it from the realm of party contest may construe politics as "strategic maneuvering to outwit an opponent and emerge as winner of a political contest" (Boladale 2017:42) Really, this definition is not totally wrong inasmuch as it is peripheral. "The scope of politics goes beyond party strategy, stratagem, propaganda etc". It enshrines the basic principle and science of governance. Thus, politics is seen as "the science and art of government" (LUCINDA & MARTINS 2015:394). Writing from the same perspective Obafemi Awolowo asserts that politics is the science or the art of the management of public affairs (Awolowo 1980:176) in modern times, the dynamics of politics especially in nations consists, of the process of making decisions that apply to members of a group "it refers to achieving and exercising position of governance – organized control over a human community, particularly a state". (Wikipedia) Karl W Deutch amplifies this point," politics is decision making through public facilities" (1974:83). The political life includes a variety of activities that affects the policy of the authorities or it as accepted by a society and influence how to implement policy. We participate in political life, if the activities we do deal with the making and implementation

of policy for society. By implication David Easton notes that:

*“Political life concerns all those varieties of activity that influence the kind of authority and adopted policy for a society and the way it is put into practice. We are said to be participating in the political life, when our activities relate in some way to the making and execution of policy for a society”* (Easton).

Man is basically a political being. He lives in the midst of scarce resources, other rational being and diverse mindsets powered by ideas and circumstances. Thus, there is a need to use authority and power to control the society.

The aim of politics is political development. Political development consists in the development of the institutions, attitude and value that form the political power system of a society. It enhances the nation’s capacity to mobilize and allocate resources. As Hans Park (1984) puts it, it refers to the capacity of the political system to satisfy the changing needs of the members of the society. (Park 1984:58). A politically developed state implies an enhanced political participation based on the principle of accountability and proper mobilization of state resources for the betterment of men. The military or armed force is a professional organisation formally authorized by a sovereign state to use force and weapons to support the interest of the state and defend against external aggression.

### **3. Chris Alli: The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army**

Major General Chris Ali (rtd) can best be termed a professional soldier: combative, diplomatic and administratively equipped. He held various appointments at infantry and brigade level. He used his book mentioned above to x-ray politics in the military. He brings out the actions and the repercussions of military interregnum in politics from a first-hand perspective.

### **4. The Problem with Nigeria Democracy**

Democracy is a universal concept and no nation can be said to have absolutely perfected it. “The

history of most African countries throughout their existence as independent nations has been mainly that of authoritarian regimes trying to masquerade as democracy. In delineating the boundaries of democracy, we are able to see that genuine democracy is absent in Africa and is even difficult to establish because of the prevailing socio-economic and political order which is monolithic and authoritarian “(Owolabi 2006:121). The problem of democracy in Nigeria goes beyond authoritarianism. It includes corruption, violation of fundamental human rights, militarisation of politics, monetization of electoral process, morbid tenacity for power or self-perpetuation in power, lack of adequate participation of the people in politics. More so, the democratic system is an imported one based on party contest and triumph in election. Party based democracy does not adequately protect the interest of the people. It cannot easily generate consensus. “The value system is the winner takes it all”. (Onyekpe 2004:64). Areas that are believed to have rooted over overwhelmingly for the wielder of power are compensated with appointment. More so, members of the winning power enjoy patronage more than others.

### **5. Chris Ali and the Rationality of Military Rules in Nigeria**

The intervention of the military class in the political administration of Nigeria is one of the essential themes that pervade Chris Ali write-up on the Nigeria military. Primarily, Ali tends to be against the phrase military intervention in Nigeria. According to him:

*... what is pertinent is perhaps to refer to civic intervention intervention in military governance since independence. The truth is that the nation since 1900 had been ruled by the military and quasi military personnel which the traditional militancy of pre-colonial authority. Practically, all colonial rulers of pre-independence Nigeria were soldiers or men who derived their stays from the threat of the use of military power* (Ali, 2001:162).

An insight into this shows that Ali has a perspective on the issue of the military in politics but another thing is the authorial

perspective of other analyst. Ali's expose is purely foundationalist. Secondly, pre-colonial authority could not be properly captured with the phrase "Traditional militancy" we cannot but acknowledge the democratic problems and the idea of check and balance in the pre-colonial time. The executive powers of the kings are not boundless. Their executive power does not absolutely overrule judicial insight and deliberation on issue. Thus, i consider the phrase traditional militancy somehow extravagant and uncomplimentary in the description of the prescribed authority in ancient Nigeria.

Going through the exposition of Chris Ali, it is made known that the Nigerian military has since 1966 developed an unquenchable thirst and hunger for political and civic power. Altogether, ten coups, as acts or intention or unfulfilled conspiracies; two against civil government and seven targeted at removing existing military regime. Five were failures attracting grave penalties to the conspirators and their associates while two installed new military governments. (Ali 2001:163) one question that must be quickly considered is why these series of coup-de-tat?

The Nigerian military has often claimed to be on rescue mission, corrective intervention and pragmatic action for political stability. Essentially, a prevailing theory on military intervention is that the armed forces venture into the arena of political power to correct the ills created by the civilians. They do this so that the ship of the nation will not be grounded.

Adenekan Olomola justified military intervention from this corrective posture in his word:

*The military class is a third force. It is an opposing powers to the abuse and misuse of power by the civilian. The problem is that democracy afford a special latitudes of freedom that can be easily misused, manipulated and marred. In the case of Nigeria, the military always comes on board when the civilians corruptly abused the tent to civil rules. (Olomola 2016:86)*

Actually, Olomola captures one of the Chief reasons for military intervention but he is too

categorical. Not all military interventions are driven by passion for correction and democratic stability. Chris Ali will not totally agree with this. In his words:

*Regional, Sectional or tribal groups as they have occurred in Nigeria seek to promote or redress the interests of a major tribe, one of the three regions or a district military interest. While rationalising their motivations, the conspirators justify their treasonable acts by appealing to nationalist sentiment, national interest and incidence of lack of national consensus (165).*

In line with the core of existentialistic philosophy, some of these coups are existential outpour of "resident nothingness crying for being" in the life of man "Man is a reservoir of possibilities" Adelo 2014:13). As such, his rationality predisposes him to several techniques of self actualisation. Coup is a ladder to political power. It can be justified on a corrective thesis as many scholars do but Ali wants us to note that in dealing with causes, we should deviate from the textbook pattern of lodging arguments at the altar of the praetorian theory, nationalism and patriotism, modernising and civilizing influence of the military protecting the people from themselves and the need of national or state security (163). Thus, beyond the thesis of political correction, there are more fundamental reasons why the military venture into the avenue of political authority. They are for self aggrandisement and the realisation of personal ambitions Ali further intensified his position on this:

Coup detent is a behavioural pattern of actions, conspirational in nature by which an individual or groups with vested interests seek to change by violent overthrow the status quo. In Nigeria's experience, the motivations have been personal ambition, tribal, ideological, hegemonic and regional imperatives it has also been applied to prevent changes in power nuances and equation. The phrase "vested interest" deserves attention coup plotters have reasons. To them coup is not an arbitrary invasion of the political share.

Within the theoretical scope of plato's political philosophy, one may consider coup as a serious

aberration and an unjustifiable infraction of the political rights of the people. The military class is mentally and physically suited for defence. They are not equipped to political leadership as Plato propounded. A cursory look at his philosophy shows that there are three groups of individuals in the society and this corresponds to the three-fold compartmentalisation of the human soul.

In the Republic, Plato asserted that the Psyche is composed of three parts: the logical, the spirited and the appetitive. This division reflects the three orders of men in the society; there will be justice in such society when each part fulfils its functions without attempting to interfere in the function of others.

Plato emphasized a well-spelt-out division of labour. Mainly, division of labour is the separation of tasks in any so that participants may specialize. "Individuals, organisations and nations are endowed with or acquired specialized capabilities and either form combination or trade to take advantage of the capabilities of others in addition to their own (Richard 2013:76) writing from this theoretical base, Plato identified the rational element, the spirited element and the appetitive element in the constitution of the human soul. The rational element is that part of a man's soul which enables him to reason, to argue and embark on critical deliberations. The spirited element is responsible for courage and strength of will, while the appetitive elements consist of desires and passion for sex, food etc. Thus a man will be psychologically healthy if the three parts function harmoniously.

Since the state is an aggregate of individual's act or action, an ideal state would be a manifestation of the correct placement of man in line with his natural amplitude. As there are three parts of the soul, there are also three groups of men in the society. An ideal state would be composed of three classes. As expatiated by Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll.

An ideal state would be composed of three classes: the ruler to administer it, warriors to defend it and all other citizens to provide the essentials of life. Each of these classes

corresponds to a division of the individual soul. The ruling class is the rational element of the society, the soldiers are its spirited element and the other citizens are its appetitive elements. . . (Avrum & Popkin 1982:59).

Plato articulated the rule of these classes, but sternly warned that the guardians are to be given absolute authority in running the state. "No one from the lower class was allowed to intervene in the administration of the government; for the member of the lower group were not expert. Ruling is a skill men differ innately in their capacities or abilities, those who exhibited ruling capacity should be trained along this line and because they have the greatest skill in ruling, they ought to be given absolute authority" (Stroll 1982:60).

In his analogy, this is a conflation of two distinct categories. Besides, Plato's analysis fenced out the artisan and auxiliaries from acting as ruler. In line with their military rule is aberration. Soldiers are mentally and physically trained to guide the state. They are not to usurp the role of the ruler.

A point to be noted is this Plato's idea as enumerated here is bound to lead to despotism, really he analysed a good division of labour but at the level of rulership, his criteria for choosing leaders cannot but produce autocratic leaders. Moreover, soldiers are not mentally and physically structured in carrying out civil rules. This argument might be very good in ancient Greece but contemporary reality and a fundamental incursion into the development of man shows a contrary stance. Chris Ali to an extent agrees with Plato. He writes that

The soldiers' role in the political environment are defined in the constitution of the land should be respected. If soldiers must intervene in governance directly, then the Nigeria constitution ought to be altered and amended to accommodate the contingency for military intervention. I believe that, so long as the constitution has no provision for military intervention, any such political adventure is manifestly illegitimate and grossly illegal, no

matter what the expedient may appear to be (Ali:85).

Is Alli saying that military rule is an aberration? Alli is tactical and conversant of situational peculiarities. Thus, he offers a balanced view. According to him:

*Those who have promoted the cankerworm of intervention through the medium of coups and similar practices which are inoroical to the growth of a democratic culture must answer sometime for this constitutional aberration and clear adventure in personal aggrandisement. . . the soldier may be the instrument of rapid and short restoration, but they should not constitute themselves into the solution in a multi-national composition like Nigeria (P.85).*

Why must Alli frown at a long stay of the military in power the reason is simple. “They not only lack the temper, they only behave like tax forces” (85). They are psychologically unfit for political rule.

Christ Ali does not believe in the usage of coup to correct political rule. “I have a very strong disdain for coups. . . coups and soldier have failed not only the nation, but also themselves as viable instrument of change and order (P.87) meanwhile a clear study of page 238 show that Ali is also a coup strategist. He is not a saint.

## 6. Conclusion

Chris Ali, is of the opinion that military intervention in political governance should be short. Short and sharp intervention not lasting than six months, for new election to take place. “It would therefore have been corrective action directed primarily at the rapid restoration of the people’s power and democratic structure” (311) meanwhile political system is complex and dedicate that, at times, short span as Ali recommended may not work.

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