



## A Historical Analysis of the Dynamics of Political Transition to Civilian Rule in Nigeria, 1998-1999

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**Abstract.** In Nigeria, military regimes have at different times professed their intentions to hand over power to civilian governments. Two of such transition programmes in the late 1970s and 1980s were successful. For instance, the 1998-1999 transition culminated in the transfer of power to an elected government within a short period of time and ushered in the longest period of civilian governance in Nigeria's history. Relying on a historical and structural approach as units of analysis, this paper examines the genesis, nature and dynamics of the Nigerian military-civilian political transition programmes. The paper finds out that the military-led transition to civilian rule and its outcome was shaped by a change in the military's organisational orientation, societal pressures and international support for an end to military rule.

**Keywords:** Civilian Rule, Democracy, Military, Transition

### 1. Introduction

A transition to civil rule is a political process of handing over power to civilians under certain structural, constitutional and other conditions that may not be obvious in the open political space. For instance, the incumbent regime (especially if it is a military junta) could bargain with civilian groups as a condition for handing over power. Generally, the power that the military wields in terms of the level of internal cohesion it enjoys and the scope of support it has in the society, as well as the international arena, determine its willingness to withdraw from the main political arena by installing a democratic civilian leadership. As at 1999, Nigeria had witnessed six transitions to civilian rule, out of which one was midwifed by the colonial government in the 1950s to set the phase for political independence. The other five were carried out by different military regimes,

out of which two reached their logical conclusion of a return to civilian rule.

It must be noted that military rule in Nigeria has been retrospectively viewed as a political aberration, or in other words, a temporary corrective measure meant to address the problems that threaten national unity and stability (Dare, 1981: 351). In a typical fashion, the military attempts to legitimise its rule by discrediting the anti-populist policies of its predecessors. Secondly, the regime makes a pledge to withdraw from the political scene on an appointed time. Thirdly, it introduces and executes a framework for civilianising the political structures of decision making (Dare, 1981: 351). The military's drive for implementing a transition to civil rule and withdrawing to the barracks however, depends on: the capacity of an incumbent military regime to checkmate certain military and civilian groups opposed to disengagement; the ability of the regime to use civilian-based networks to legitimise its brief rule before handing over to civilians and; lastly, the ability of the regime to portray some semblance of political neutrality in the process of handing over to civilians (Dare, 1981: 351). Another important angle of this discourse can be seen within the concentric lenses of the organisational, societal and external orientations toward the imperative of military withdrawal to the barracks and transfer of power to elected civilian groups. These forces consist of political elite excluded from power and sections of the business community, professional groups and many senior officials of previous military dictatorships and the international community (Ake, 2000: 127-128, 132). An attempt to elongate its tenure could affect its internal cohesion as witnessed in the first (1966-1979) and second (1984-1999) periods of military rule in Nigeria where a number aborted and successful countercoups took place. Similarly, the pressures emanating from the society for an end to military rule as a result of political and

economic drawbacks can force the regime to retreat to the barracks. In conjunction with domestic forces within the military and civilian circles, the international community can introduce, or withdraw incentives in order for transition to civil rule programme to take place.

In the case of Nigeria, the military regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar came into being after the death of General Sani Abacha in June, 1998. The new regime formulated and executed the shortest transition to civil rule programme that culminated in the installation of an elected civilian government in May, 1999. The regime adopted the presidential system that was operated in the short-lived Second Republic (1979-1983). This transition is significant for two reasons (1) it is the shortest transition to civilian rule in the history of Nigeria and (2) it paved the way for the longest period of uninterrupted civilian rule under a presidential democracy. This is in contrast to the short-lived First and Second Republics. Surprisingly, the head of a former military regime, which handed over power to civilians in the Second Republic was elected as the executive president.

This paper therefore, examines the transition from military rule to civilian rule in Nigeria from August, 1998 and May, 1999. In so doing, the paper raises a number of questions; what were the forces and factors responsible for the transition to civil rule programme? What was the significance of the transition and what was the outcome of the process?

The paper adopts the constitutional evolutionary model as a framework, while relying on the historical and structural approaches as units of analysis. The paper also examines the types of transition to civil rule, identifies the forces and factors that provided its trajectory, processes and significance.

## **2. Types of Political Transitions under Military Rule**

The literature identifies three broad types of military transition to a civilian administration. These are counter-coup approach, the military turned-political approach and constitutional evolutionary model (Adekson, 1979: 214-216). The first type is the counter-coup inspired approach in which a military regime is ousted by a dissident faction because its policies are seen to be eroding the political legitimacy of the military in the eyes of society (Adekson, 1979: 214). Depending on the motives behind the counter-coup, the new regime partakes in a partial, or complete disengagement from the political

arena. For example, one of the legitimising policies adopted by the Babangida regime in 1985 was a promise on behalf of the military to hand over power to an elected civilian government. The transition ended up installing an interim government that eventually gave way to another military regime.

The second type is the military-turned-political pattern that involves a military regime transmuting to a pseudo-civilian government. In order to deflect pressures for democratisation, a military regime mutates into a 'competitive authoritarian regime' as a strategy for preserving its status quo. A restricted form of electoral democracy is instituted to merely legitimise the transmutation from a military regime to a civilian government (Levitsky and Way, 2003; Levitsky and Way, 2006). Where the organisational cohesion of the military is threatened, an intra-corporate struggle between two groups takes place. A pro-disengagement faction challenges the institutionalisation of a military permanence in mainstream politics. If the anti-disengagement group has the ascendancy, especially in alliance with prominent civilian groups, it carries out a purge of these challengers (Anene, 1997: 64). This regime type adopts certain aspects of democratic rules to widen its support base in the society. This model clearly fits the Abacha transition where the military ruler attempted to transmute to a civilian leader under a *de jure* government controlled-five party system (Fayemi, 1999: 71; Ojo, 2014: 32).

The third type is the constitutional evolutionary model. Here, the military regime engages in complete disengagement for a civilian dispensation under a "workable relationship between the military and civilian sectors of society" (Adekson, 1979: 216). This type has significance in explaining the transition programmes of the Obasanjo and Abubakar administrations, which respectively succeeded in installing elected civilian governments in October, 1999 and May, 1999.

## **3. Regime Type and Transition Policy**

The life-span and outcome of transitions can be categorised in two ways on the basis of the motives of the regime (Bennett and Kirk-Greene, 1978). In the first type, the military is more of a caretaker regime. A swift transition is initiated due to negative consequences in the continuation of military rule. To the caretaker regime "coexistence with a new set of political leaders is possible" (Bennett and Kirk-Greene, 1978: 13). As such, the military hands over to an elected civilian government within the shortest possible period. Meanwhile, it portrays itself as a

corrective regime. It is based on the belief that “comprehensive systematic reforms are required, which only the military can achieve” before it hands power to an elected civilian government (Bennett and Kirk-Greene, 1978: 13). The transition is executed in phases. The colonial transition to independence under Governors Lyttleton and Robertson was in phases (Nasidi, 2018: 4-6). This was characterised by granting some form of self-rule at the sub-national levels and setting the process of creating an indigenous officer corps for the military in preparation for independence at a later period.

In the post-colonial era, the regimes of Yakubu Gowon (1966-75) Muhammadu Buhari (1984-85) and Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93) fit this corrective picture given their decisions to postpone the dates of terminating their rule. The Murtala-Obasanjo (1975-1979) regimes seem to have some peculiarities because they have dual functions (of a caretaker and a corrective government).

#### 4. The Driving Forces and Factors behind the 1998/1999 Transition to Civil Rule

The death of General Sani Abacha in June, 1998 saw a change in the political direction of Nigeria. The policy of transmuted a military dictator to a civilian president suddenly gave way to a new transition that ensured the handing over power to a civilian regime through a more credible electoral process. The implication is that the praetorian orientation among military leaders gave way to an abdication scenario (Anene, 1997: 64). This is because a web of forces and factors shaped the transition to civilian rule and the drive for the military withdrawal from the political centre-stage.

The first factor can be attributed to the protracted factionalism that existed within the officer corps. This is because, military intervention(s) had negatively affected the level of professionalism in the political structure of the Nigerian state. There was the need for officers in order to accept subordination to constituted (civil) authority and insulate the military from external influence (Whiteman, 2008: 32-33). Besides, the military had already inflicted other damages to its own well-being. It is observed that:

*Budgetary allocation to various military formations was misappropriated by unit commanders without developing the military institutional infrastructure like the barracks, (equipment, materials) and logistics research and development. Furthermore, staff allowance, welfare packages and pension benefits were embezzled by officers' corps who had no opportunity to occupy political offices (Yoroms, 2011: 123).*

As a result of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections and its protracted crises, the officer corps within the military hierarchy had crystallised into two broad factions- the pro-disengagement and the anti-disengagement factions. The latter were beneficiaries of military rule and had a strong reason to oppose military withdrawal because of the possibility of retribution when civil rule sets in (Anene, 2000). These military officers and their civilian cohorts were largely the loyalists of Abacha and had the upper hand during the regimes of Babangida and Abacha. With Abacha's demise, the tables of opportunity turned in favour of the military democrats. The emergence of General Abubakar as the new head of state however, favoured the faction that opted for the policy of military disengagement. The pro-disengagement faction placed the “value the survival and efficacy of the military above all else” a policy of “a return to the barracks as a means to preserve military unity” (Ulfelder, 2005: 318). This conformed to the demands of a wide section of the civilian elites. A combination of self-conviction and intense external persuasion made this new ruling faction to believe that the military should relinquish power if its corporate and professional outlooks are to be restored. Prolonged military rule with its attendant problems of governmental corruption, factionalism and indiscipline had done much damage not only to the civilian sphere of the state, but also to the ethos of military professionalism (Oluwabiyi & Duruji, 2021). In tactful admittance of past mistakes and to solicit domestic and international support for the policy direction of the new regime, General Abubakar made a national broadcast on Monday July 20, 1999 where he stated that:

*.... mistakes have been made, particularly as our most recent attempt at democratisation was marred by maneuvering and manipulations of structures and actions. At the end, we have succeeded in creating a defective foundation on which a solid democratic structure can neither be constructed nor sustained (Guardian Newspaper, July 21, 1998: 15).*

Because of the protracted failure by previous military regimes to execute a smooth transition to civil rule programme that would reach its logical conclusion, the military establishment had realised the grave error in terms of the effect this had on its corporate image and internal cohesion. As such, the military institution had over time lost respect, especially in the public domain. The emergence of new leaders within the top echelons of the military favours a withdrawal from governance. The new military regime was therefore, dominated by those who realised that the corporate survival and role of the Nigerian military can better be accomplished in the barracks as against

when it remains in power. The way forward was for the regime to install democratic governance and leave the centre-stage. This group had now dominated the levers of decision making and was able to placate potential dissenters.

The second factor is the influence wielded by retired military officers who in the past held strategic appointments in previous military regimes. As a group, they never developed as a major force during the nationalist movement of the colonial period largely because they seldom crystallised into a cohesive group among the emergent indigenous elite classes (Olusanya, 1968). In the post-colonial period, a number of factors such as the cycle of military coups, the civil war (1967-1970), mass purges and economic factors led to a large number of military retirements and dismissals (Adekanye, 1999: 3-14). It is important to observe that the emergence of the military elite both in uniform and in retirement as a powerful bloc has its roots in the mid-1970s. The indigenisation and nationalisation policies created the conditions that enhanced their emergence and dominance in the state-driven processes of primitive accumulation. This dominance became obvious towards the end of first dispensation of the military rule. It is observed that 'many of the military officers who ruled the country between 1975 and 1979 successfully established themselves as businessmen and politicians courtesy of the nationalized companies with close links to the military' (Fayemi, 1999: 69). During the transition to civil rule programme of the late 1970s, a number of them joined the parties of the Second Republic and even contested for executive offices within these parties. Some contested for positions during the December 1976 local government elections. About 43 percent of those who contested for the 69 councillorship positions in Kaduna state for example, were retired military personnel (Adekanye, 1999: 71). On the other hand, however, most of the retired senior officers preferred to remain behind the scene as supporters of such parties. In retirement, most engaged in private economic activities, which covered agriculture, defence contract procurement, banking, private security, shipping, mining and construction to mention, but a few (Adekanye, 1999: 35). During the Second Republic, a number of them also contested for legislative and executive positions at the federal and state levels. It was however, not until latter part of Babangida's transition programme that their influence in partisan activities increased, especially after the annulment of the elections of June 12, 1993. Their activities were not coordinated under cohesive umbrella because of their political inclinations within the context of the June 12 crises.

For example, while General Akinrinade was an advocate of the June 12 mandate, it was noted that Generals Obasanjo and Yar'Adua supported the idea of an interim government of national unity (Momoh and Adejumbi, 1999: 256). These inclinations were largely defined by political culture of factionalism that permeated the military and post-military realms. These ex-military men were also unable to crystallise into a single political group after retirement despite being monolithically socialised for a long time, especially during their military service.

Between 1991 and 1998, the number of retired military officers that visibly joined partisan politics increased and included personalities like Generals Yakubu Gowon, Ibrahim Haruna, Olufemi Olutoye, Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, Joseph Garba, Dumuje and Colonel Yohanna Madaki (Adekanye, 1999: 192). During Babangida's transition programme (1987-1993) one of the most prominent political gladiators that emerged was Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua. He established the Peoples Front (PF), a strong political structure that was used to build a network of political bridges. In addition, a former head of state, General Yakubu Gowon joined one of the two government-approved parties to contest for the presidency in 1992. It was not until at the height of agitations against military rule in the late 1990s that many of them became members of interest groups (in various ways) demanding an end to military rule. They included Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Yar'Adua (both of whom were imprisoned by General Abacha), Dan Suleiman, Alani Akinrinade, Joseph Garba, David Mark, Ike Nwachukwu, Emeka Odumegu Ojukwu, Lawrence Onoja, Abubakar Umar, Braimoh Yusuf, Tunde Ogbeha, Theophilus Danjuma, Muhammadu Buhari, Tunde Idiagbon, Ibrahim Babangida, John Shagaya, Jeremiah Useni, and Augustus Aikhomu.

As new self-professed democrats, they were now increasingly convinced that civil rule was the viable option out of the Nigeria's protracted political crises (Nasidi, 2023: 19). Despite being out of military service, they maintained some form of informal ties with serving officers in successive regimes and at the same time established bonds with civilian elite in the political and economic realms. Their role in the transition process particularly in the activities of political parties is a manifestation of the influence they had in the transition agenda of General Abubakar.

The third factor was the direct and indirect roles of the international community. Many Western governments, intergovernmental bodies like the

European Union (EU), the Commonwealth (CW) and the United Nations (UN), which made policy pronouncements of condemnations and sanctions against prolonged military rule, as well as the support they provided to pro-democracy Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). These include the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Campaign for Democracy (CD), Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), Civil Rights Congress (CRC), and the Campaign for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR). In retrospect, the role of external forces provided support to the domestic agitations for military withdrawal in Nigeria (Obasanjo, 1999: 263).

Similarly, most Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) mounted persistent pressures on the regimes of Babangida, Shonekan and Abacha to quit and respect the results of the June 12, 1993 elections. In 1998, the Group of 34 (G-34), a coalition of prominent, but strange bedfellows comprising both civil and retired military leaders called on the Abacha regime to abandon his obvious transmutation agenda, which was supposed to have culminated in his assumption of a civilianised presidency by October, 1998. It must be noted however that, the role of the CSOs was limited in scope and intensity given the fact that they were not united in the struggle against military rule because of their 'enfeebled and incapacitated nature' (Momoh and Adejumbi, 1999: 295).

The fourth factor was the apathy of the general public who had largely lost confidence in the political system. This subjective posture was largely due to years of governmental corruption, repressive socio-economic policies and the cumulative effect of the Babangida and Abacha failed transitions had considerably 'eroded public trust in government and deepened ethno regional divisions' (Enemuo, 1999: 3). Leading political activists notably Chiefs Gani Fawehinmi, Chief Anthony Enahoro and General Alani Akinrinade made a series of agitations ranging from the convening of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) to the establishment of a Confederation and regional army commands through the devolution of powers (Enemuo, 1999: 3). The general mood of the majority of Nigerians was largely a mixture of skepticism and relative indifference to events at the political centre-stage. This development also coupled with the harsh policies of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which made a wide section of the populace to lose confidence in government.

The Abubakar regime departed from past tendencies and set in motion, the process of restoring the public

confidence in the political system. This was clearly demonstrated by the pledges to restore civil rule and the release of many political prisoners on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1998. General Obasanjo was among the 16 high profile detainees released. He had been incarcerated and convicted to serve a commuted life sentence by the Abacha regime. The social bond between government and the society is a major prerequisite for the corporate existence and stability of the country.

## 5. Significance of the Transition

The transition programme embarked upon by the regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar was characterised by a number of significant events. These had an impact on the nature and outcome of the transition programme. The Abubakar transition is the shortest in Nigeria's history as it was executed within a period of nine months (July, 1998 to April, 1999). Since the late 1970s when the Obasanjo military regime had successfully organised a transition with political zeal, no other military government after it had done so until 15 years after the Second Republic had been sacked by soldiers who claimed to have intervened as a corrective measure.

The endorsement by the international community notably the Commonwealth (CW) and the United Nations (UN) of the transition programme was manifested through the partial lifting of certain diplomatic restrictions on top government officials. This was followed by the visits of diplomatic delegations from the CW and the UN led by their scribes, Chief Emeka Anyaoku and Mr. Kofi Annan, respectively. In addition, some western governments sought to broker a solution over the crisis between the regime and Chief Abiola, the presumable winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election, who later died on July 7, 1998 while having a meeting with an American delegation in Abuja that included Susan Rice, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Nigeria's diplomatic isolation came to an end as Nigerian officials resumed interactions with foreign governments on bilateral and multilateral relations.

A gathering took place in Abuja on Saturday October 3, 1998 that would have implication for the transition programme and the nature of civil-military relations in a post-military dispensation. The military regime invited both serving and retired top brass drawn from the military and police. It consisted of all military and police officers equivalent to the rank of Brigadier-general and above who had served from the 1970s to

the late 1990s. The parley between serving and retired military brass did come not as a surprise because “long after leaving the force, typical retired top officers continue to wield an amazingly powerful hold over their colleagues, meaning most erstwhile juniors, still in active service” (Adekanye, 1999:175). The gathering discussed the way forward regarding the military’s image and a framework for consigning the military to the barracks, as well as preventing its return to power. The two visible absentees were former heads of state, Generals Obasanjo and Buhari (Adekanye, 1999: 195).

The regime opened the arena to the politicians to set up their own parties in order to contest for elections. The new regime opted for a slightly amended version of the defunct 1979 constitution. On July 20, 1998, it unveiled a ten-month transition programme that commenced in August, 1998 and ended in May, 1999 (Onuoha, 2002: 322-324). The elections were conducted in three phases- the Local Government elections on December 5, 1998; the Governorship and State Legislative elections on January 9, 1999; the Federal Legislative Elections on February 20, 1999; and the Presidential election on February 27, 1999 (Enemuo, 1999). The performance of the political parties that participated in the Local government election was used as the basis for eventually registering three of them- the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the All Peoples’ Party (APP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) (Nasidi, 2020: 45-48). The national spread in membership of the PDP was more than the other two parties and included the members of the defunct SDP and of significance, ‘the solid support of most retired military officers, some suggest as many as 200 of them’ (Mustapha, 1999: 282). The APP was an aggregation of conservative and pro-Abacha politicians. While the PDP and APP had greater national spread than the AD, the latter drew most of its membership from the Southwestern part of Nigeria among the disciples of the late Obafemi Awolowo and members of NADECO, a June 12 pressure group. The AD was registered in order to broaden the political space and douse potential opposition to the transition.

The PDP held its primaries on November 26, 1998 and two major groups competed for the presidential ticket. The first group consisted mainly of elements that belonged to the defunct ruling party in the Second Republic, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). They fielded Chief Alex Ekwueme, a former Vice President in the Second Republic. The disciples of late Shehu Yar’Adua and many retired military officers preferred General Olusegun Obasanjo. As a result of the money-bag politics displayed by the

retired generals at the convention, the candidature of Obasanjo carried the day (The New Humanitarian, 23 February, 1999). This group had served under General Obasanjo during the civil war days and when he was the military head of state in 1976. The APP convention on December 11, 1998 was characterised by a crisis and violence as Alhaji Abubakar Olusola Saraki, a highly prospective aspirant met a strong opposition to his candidacy, especially from party executives. His candidature was viewed as threatening to the ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ of zoning the presidency to the south. Eventually, Chief Ogbonnaya Onu was appointed as interim presidential flag bearer. On the same day, the AD convention, Chief Olu Falae, a federal technocrat and a former secretary to the military government of General Babangida defeated Chief Bola Ige. The latter was a former civilian governor in the Second Republic and an ardent critic of military rule. The APP formed an alliance with the AD. Chief Onu of the APP was substituted with Alhaji Umaru Shinkafi, a former spy chief as the running mate to Chief Falae. The transition programme was a calculated process where two presidential candidates had emerged by December, 1998. The serving and retired military leaders in alliance with a broad section of the civilian elite had opted for two presidential aspirants from the south in order to mollify the divisive agitations in the political arena already aggravated by prolonged military rule. In the same light, the candidates were relatively connected to the military establishment. Olusegun Obasanjo was part of the military establishment from 1961 to 1979. The regime of General Babangida sponsored his bid to become the UN secretary general. Chief Olu Falae was a federal bureaucrat who had served under the Babangida regime as the county’s top civil servant. He was known to have defended some of the regime’s harsh policies, notably, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Like Obasanjo, he was under detention during the Abacha regime and was released on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1998 on the orders of General Abubakar. The presidential election took place on February 27, 1999 with Obasanjo winning the contest having scored 62.78 percent of the total valid votes.

The processes that led to the emergence of General Olusegun Obasanjo as an elected president implied that the military regime in alliance with some civilian groups, masterminded the transition. The outcome of the transition was made possible by ‘the emergence of the military in retirement as the most potent force in Nigeria, based on its massive fortunes accumulated, and social networks established, during its long stay in power’ (Enemuo, 1999: 7). A veiled reference was made of the ‘prominent role played by

retired and serving military officers in the whole process of party formation and selection of presidential candidates' (Fayemi, 1999: 69). Generals Danjuma and Babangida had visited Obasanjo just after his release from prison custody in order to persuade him to contest the presidential elections. The manner in which Obasanjo was released from prison and how he was persuaded and supported to return as Nigeria's leader seems to suggest that the Abubakar transition was also a calculated one. This transition is no doubt a deliberate and calculated process of transferring the reins of power through an election from a military regime to civilian regime, which has the vested interests of members of the departing regime and those of the governing elite. The emergence of new leaders in the process is determined by the interests of domestic elite and their external allies. Where domestic opposition is weak and the external environment is disposed to such a direction, the calculated transition is easily undertaken by the departing military regime. As such, the process involves the careful selection of those who would emerge as contestants in the electoral process. Those who were viewed as harmful to such vested interests are either proselytized, or schemed out in the struggle for power. While the military establishment had finally come to terms with the fact that civil rule was the only viable option, it came with a political caveat. As identified by Kohn (1997) and reinforced by Dinneya (2006), prolonged military rule tends to create a materially privileged and bureaucratically-equipped military elite. This social engineering gradually creates a general impression among the military elite, both serving and retired, of a doubt about the civilian elite abilities to forge the bonds of national unity and stability. As such, the calculated transition becomes the only rational option. This discrete policy played a role in shaping the direction and outcome of the transition programme to civil rule. Thus, it was more of a question of who the military would hand over to before stepping aside.

The emergence of Obasanjo presidency in May, 1999 can be situated within Ekeh's civilianisation thesis, based on 'the bold-faced assumption that the affairs of the post-military state can be effectively managed only by the former military rulers' (Ekeh, 1999: 75). In retrospect, this line of thinking was openly declared by Shehu Musa Yar'Adua during the Babangida transition of which he (Yar'Adua) was a presidential aspirant. At the 1992 SDP campaign rally in Sokoto, he declared that:

*Being a retired soldier was one of the reasons why I and my friends decided that I should contest... I am the most competent to stop the military from coming*

*back to power because as a retired military man, I know them very well and they know me. I possess the capability of preventing them from staging coups* (Farris and Bomoi, 2004: 200).

The democratic mandate of General Obasanjo can be attributed to two major inter-connected factors. The first reason had to do with his personality. He represented the federal side and negotiated the terms for Biafra's surrender in 1970. He was a former military head of state between 1976 and 1979 and made history as the first Nigerian military ruler to hand over power to an elected civilian regime. In 1983, the coup leaders had solicited that he resumed his military commission to head the new military regime. He allegedly turned down the offer (Obasanjo, 1990: 227). For these achievements, he became not only a respected national figure, but also an international statesman having connections with international bodies such as the Commonwealth (CW) and later, Transparency International (TI). He was also a member of the Eminent Persons Group of the CW, which was saddled with bringing an end to the Apartheid rule in South Africa. He eventually became a critic of subsequent military rule under Generals Buhari, Babangida and Abacha as he consistently advocated for a return to civilian democratic rule. He became a political prisoner in 1995 when he was jailed in connection with a coup plot against the regime of General Abacha. The second one had to do with the support base he quickly cultivated as a candidate within the rising retired military elite and a wide section of Nigeria's civilian elite across ethnic, religious and geographical divides. In a revelation, General Babangida gave the reason why Obasanjo was picked to contest for the presidency. He said:

The emergence of Obasanjo came as a result of what happened in the country. The country was in a very serious crisis and we had to find the solution to these problems... So, we looked for a man who has been involved in the affairs of this country, who held position either in the military or in the cabinet and who has certain beliefs about Nigeria (Sunday Trust, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2013:3).

The retired military officers who supported him contributed 400 million Naira for his electoral bid (Enemuo, 1999: 5). The PDP remained united despite the acrimony that accompanied his emergence as its presidential flag bearer and went ahead to exploit the crisis within the APP as some of its leading figures like Olusola Saraki and Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu supported his candidacy (Enemuo, 1999: 5).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper examined civil-military relations within the context of the previous attempts at transiting from military rule to civilian rule from the eve of Nigeria's independence to the period 1998/1999. It concludes that a combination of factors both internal and external to the military establishment, in various degrees, have shaped the genesis, direction and outcomes of the Abubakar transition in 1998 and 1999. It is also established that the military's withdrawal from mainstream politics was characterised by the emergence of a 'pro-democratic' military leadership. The fear of factionalism and continued political turmoil in the country greatly shaped the orientation of such military leaders. Their worldviews converged with domestic and the international agitations. The latter on the other hand, imposed certain conditions regarding democratic governance in its economic relations with the Nigerian state. This implies that the transition was a product of many overlapping forces.

In essence, the transition was made possible by an aggregative agitation of domestic and external forces within the context of a political caveat nurtured and executed by the departing military regime and its allies in the civilian realms. The transition was carefully arranged and calculated to ensure the emergence of a civil leadership that was fairly acceptable to a wide section of interest groups that cut across the military, civilian and international divides. That was what ensured the success of the Obasanjo political regime because of his unique role in agitating for a smooth political transition from the military regime to the civilian rule.

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