

**GOVERNANCE, CORRUPTION AND SECURITY:
THE MISSING LINKS IN NIGERIA**

**BEING AN ANNUAL LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT
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By

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Introduction

Let me start by saying that it is an irony that the ivory tower would be asking an unknown soldier like me to come and deliver a lecture. It is particularly humbling when I look around this arena and I see accomplished scholars and other

professionals sitting to listen to an old soldier. I am to speak on GOVERNANCE, CORRUPTION AND SECURITY: THE MISSING LINKS IN NIGERIA. I am to join the national discourse on finding the missing links between governance and the delivery of security which is the most important of all dividends which a government is expected to pay the citizenry. But first, I commend the organisers of this event for the choice of topic and the theme which are very germane and timely at this point of our national development. But is it not interesting that what we are discussing here today was discussed thousands of years ago? The International Monetary Fund (IMF) took note of this fact in one of its regular engagements and interventions on the challenging narrative of corruption and governance. And I quote it:

Corruption is not a new phenomenon. Two thousand years ago, Kautilya, the Prime Minister of an Indian Kingdom had already written a book, Arthashastra, discussing it. Seven centuries ago, Dante placed bribers in the deepest parts of Hell.... Shakespeare gave corruption a prominent role in some of his plays; and the American Constitution made bribery and treason, the two explicitly mentioned crimes that could justify the impeachment of a US President.”

- IMF Staff Papers, Vol. 45 (December, 1998), pp559-94).

The above tells us that corruption and efforts to tackle it are as old as history can recollect. I will now proceed with some conceptual clarifications. What does governance mean? What is corruption? What is security? I will briefly dwell on the key concepts: Nigeria; Governance; Corruption and Security before going further in the attempt at discussing the topic of today.

Nigeria is a country of about 170 million with a GDP per capital of \$2,758 and an economy that is almost exclusively dependent on the unstable and unreliable fate of crude oil. With a literacy rate of 60.8%. World Bank statistics put more than 46% of the people below poverty line. The country has other troubling statistics such as infant mortality rate which is 88.4 of every 1,000 births. There are other governance and development indicators such as Global Competitiveness Index, Human Development Index, Rule of Law and Press Freedom Index on which the nation needs a lot of improvement. What do all these say about governance in Nigeria? we will come back to that.

Governance

The Canada based Institute of Governance (IoG) has a working definition of governance which we are adopting for the purpose of this lecture. It says

“Governance determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.”

While acknowledging that the concept has several definitions across disciplines, the IoG notes that most of the definitions rest on three dimensions: authority, decision-making and accountability. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sets out five basic principles of good governance. These principles, as enunciated by the IoG are: participation in decision making for all citizens in a free

atmosphere; consensus orientation, direction, performance “(effectiveness and efficiency of institutions in producing results that meet people's needs while making the best use of resources)”, accountability; transparency; equity and the Rule of Law.

A cursory look at the principles will show the place of corruption in misgovernance. We could observe that almost all the principles overlap with the point of intersection being transparency in the handling of public affairs. In other words, the common denominator in the state, where good governance reigns, is the reasonable absence of corruption. It is transparency, the absence of doubts on how accounts are rendered and on whether they are rendered at all.

Security

We will get an idea of what insecurity means by defining security. Buzan (1991:18) defines security as the “pursuit of freedom from threats.” Dictionary definitions are more direct and elucidating: It is “the state of being free from danger or threat.” Insecurity, on the other hand is “uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; lack of confidence.” It is also “the state of being open to danger or threat; lack of protection.”

Having defined the basic concepts, can we explore the cross roads of Governance and Corruption – the relationships that may exist across them which ultimately determine how secure or insecure the nation-state is. Should and shouldn't there be a link between these concepts, the management of which serves as recipe for the construction of a sane and good society? Is there a connection between

governance and security on one hand, and corruption on the other? Can there be good governance and corruption at the same time? Where there is corruption can security as we know it cohabit with it? But, can we look at corruption, its meaning and features?

Corruption

The World Bank defines corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gain.” This definition, though almost universally adopted as fairly representative of what corruption is, has an area of controversy which is the question of whether only acts that generate private gain could be considered corrupt. As noted by Vito Tanzi in his 1998 seminar work on Corruption around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope and Cure, “sometimes the abuse of public power is not necessarily for one's private benefit..... In fact, in many countries, some of the proceeds of corruption go to finance the activities of political parties” (p23). We know this is as true as truth. All through the life of our nation, every major change of government has been followed and characterized by probes, trials and convictions over changes of abuse of office to fund political parties. It happened in the first republic, it happened in the second republic and what we are witnessing about persons who served in the last regime is a continuation of a story on how not to run a nation. I do not have to remind you of daily reports in Nigeria of huge sums of public money going to chieftains of political parties for the financing of elections. The International Monetary Fund in 1998 working paper, noted that the cost of corruption on societal progress is so enormous that all around world today, a lot of attention is paid to it. You all can remember President Muhammadu Buhari's popular sound bite: if we don't kill corruption, corruption will kill us.” He couldn't have said it better – indeed, corruption kills.

Corruption, Governance and Security

Debate on corruption and governance can be very interesting. There are varying ideas on what it does and what it does not do to societal well being. There are, indeed, scholars who argue that, ironically, corruption could serve the need of redistribution of wealth. Disciples of such school of thought are those who, because of the current economic challenges in the country, now sing “bring back our corruption” believing that their succour could only come through acts of corruption. No corrupt society survives ultimately. What these elements do not seem to appreciate is that corruptive acts are like contagious diseases. They spread quietly and kill silently. Some studies have shown that wherever corrupt

acts are treated with kid gloves, they usually and gradually become normal and the situation gets critical if the employer responds by not punishing culprits but by taking the welfare of the employee for granted with the belief that he/she has other means of survival. Wherever this happens, the system collapses. And when it happens in sensitive state institutions such as the security services, the state is imperilled. That is the case when operatives collaborate with criminals and criminals get confident enough to do more. What follows then is that others emulate them and everyone becomes ultimately unsafe.

According to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) corruption has far reaching effect on any society's aspiration to have good governance. Both, it said, exist in a continuum but occupy opposite poles. It goes further:

Whereas governance, with its end goal of creating a good government, aims to serve the interest of the people, corruption, through the use of public office and resources, serves the narrow interest of family and allies. Good government is bound by rules aimed to create a transparent and accountable government; corruption plays discreetly and sometimes directly on these rules to make decisions which will benefit those who have access to power and the highest bidder.

For so long, we have allowed a system which looks the other way when officials play on our rules. The result has been a general state of anomie. The Transparency International (TI) in its last Corruption Perception Index ranked Nigeria 136th out of 176 countries with a score of 27 over 100. On the Failed States Index, Nigeria ranked 17th in 2007; 18th in 2008; 15th in 2009, 11th in 2013 and 14th in 2015 out of 177 countries. Social scientists will see a correlation between our scores on the Transparency Index and our position on the Failed State (now called Fragile State) Index. The inference here is that corruption and state failure cohabit, like adulterous bed fellows. What this tells us is that systemic failure is not far from wherever public accountability is lacking and government business is conducted in an opaque manner. It is sad enough that outsiders say Nigeria and Nigerians are corrupt, but is very significant to hear what Nigerians have to say about themselves and their country. A 2015 statement by TI captured this in an interesting way:

Corruption hits hardest at the poor in Nigeria who make up more than 40 percent of the 179million people. Global Financial Integrity estimates more than US\$157 billion in the past decade has left the country illicitly. Corruption is everywhere; even the health and medical services, considered the least corrupt government institution, are considered very corrupt by 41 percent of Nigerians.

What effects does corruption have on governance and what are its implications for the survival and safety of the people and the state? We are all familiar with the failure of Somalia as a country. It became a failed state in the 1990s “due to the instability, violence, and protracted lack of a permanent central authority. Somalia also topped the Failed States Index (FSI) between 2008 and 2013.” Between 1992 and 1993 I was in Somalia commanding the Nigerian contingent in UNOSOM. That tour of duty exposed me to the reality of a nation. Ken Menkhaus in his paper on “Governance without government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building and the Politics of Coping” argued that Somalia did not just fail as a result of the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. He, rather, dated the failure of the state to 1980s when corruption, incompetence and the historical internal contradictions of that country combined to systematically abort its destiny. And I quote him:

Conflict drivers in Nigeria are complex and overlapping. Issues of poverty, inequality, a high dependence on oil exports for government revenue, corruption and patronage networks, as well as challenges around public health, infrastructure, education, and access to finance abound. Communal violence, often between pastoralists and farmers, occurs in the Middle Belt. In the oil rich Niger Delta region, violence often relates to competition over “resource control.” In the Northeast, the so-called “Boko Haram” insurgency has killed thousands since it burst onto the scene in the summer of 2009.

Suddenly, we found that the Nigerian military started having challenges of fighting almost to the point of embarrassment for those of us who are products of that institution. There were concerns and questions on what could have suddenly gone wrong. There is the tendency for us to underrate the impact corruption could have on the governance and security of a state. Robert Rotberg in his “Failed States, Collapsed States, weak states; Causes and Indicators” pin-pointed official corruption as a key causative agent for state failure. He said, “Failed States are typified by deteriorating or destroyed infrastructures. Metaphorically,

the more potholes (or main roads turned to rutted tracks), the more a state will exemplify failure. As rulers siphon funds from the state coffers, so there are fewer capital resources for road crews, equipment, and raw materials.” He specifically declared that a state fails when it can no longer provide what he described as “political goods” to its people.

Robert Rotberg asserts that:

There is a hierarchy of political goods. None is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security. Individuals alone, almost exclusively in special or particular circumstances, can attempt to secure themselves.

Or groups of individuals can band together to organise and purchase goods or services that maximize their sense of security.

Traditionally, and usually, however, individuals and groups cannot easily or effectively substitute private security for the full spectrum of public security. The state's prime function is to provide that political good of security—to prevent cross-border invasions and infiltrations, and any loss of territory; to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security; and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the state and with their fellow inhabitants without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion. The delivery of a range of other desirable political goods becomes possible when a reasonable measure of security has been sustained.

What the above tells us is that a combination of negative behaviours with corruption as key can spin a nation out of its orbit. A very recent report of the Human Rights Watch about Nigeria gave a sad account of what insecurity can do to a nation and its future. It stated that: “In total, some 952,029 school-age children have been forced to flee Boko Haram violence in Nigeria, with around 600,000 losing access to schooling.” Now, if poverty is endemic because of lack of education and insecurity would make access to education not only difficult but risky and deadly, what and where then is the way out? One key way out is to have a military that is operationally capable of defending the nation and its citizens. However, can we have that institution, if the ills of the larger society that contributed to the emergence of insecurity, seep into the security forces? No, it is not possible. A very sick doctor is the unlikely person to attend properly to

another sick person. Another report by the Transparency International stated this about our society:

.....the (Nigerian) military's corruption must become a top priority (for the new government). Nigeria's military establishment scored a very poor 'E' grade on a scale from 'A' to 'F' in the last Transparency International, UK's Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index, which measures corruption risk in defence establishments around the world. If the military is not up to the task of tackling terrorist groups like Boko Haram, the country will be faced with continual insecurity and that will exacerbate any fight against corruption.

That is very damning, tragically cyclical and very unfortunate. The Nigerian military is one of my major constituencies and I am not going to join those who unjustly vilify it and make blanket allegations and condemnations. But, I must warn my colleagues who are still in the system to watch it and do what is right and just at all times as we were taught at the Academy. I do not claim to have the facts but perceptions such as the above coupled with recent revelations have given reasons for very sober reflections on the state of this very important institution of national unity and development. I will also appeal that as we tackle this menace in our key institutions, we refrain from flushing the baby down the drain with the bath water. We must be very painstaking in identifying the corrupt without tar-brushing the entire institution, which in actual fact we need for the delivery of goods that define good governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure many of you are quietly asking: What did he do to fight all these ills when he was in power as a State Governor? I will answer briefly, I realise very early in the life of my administration that a key channel of corruption is the procurement process. And, so I was one of the Governors (if not the first) in Nigeria to domesticate the Public Procurement Act in my state. I appointed a Special Adviser in charge of Due Process Office and made him function according to the law. Every expenditure of government passed through the process so much that there were persons in my government who believed I was being wicked by being too stringent. But there is nothing as upright as being upright. You all know how suddenly we left government and how many times our books were examined. You all remember that after the exercises, which were very rigorous we came out clean. The lesson there is that, if and when you are in public office, always know that a king could come, who would not know Joseph.

The rule is to secure yourself by being on the side of the law in all you do. There could be a genuine mistake which of course is normal with all humans, and when that happens, the system would be considerate if it is found that you followed the rules.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is very easy on the roof top and condemn corruption. What is universally agreed is that stamping it out completely is as difficult as it is daunting. If it was easy, we would not be discussing it here today. Sincerely speaking, centuries after societies across all cultures had made it a prime enemy of the society. But because humanity has been very resilient in fighting whatever or whoever is identified as an enemy, the battle must continue to be fought on all fronts. The first step to take is to tackle the root cause by reforming the state, the judiciary system and the people's value system. As long as the ordinary man wants his brother in government so that he can have his own share of the public cake, there will continue to be a scramble and even a stampede in the public sphere. In such a situation, rules will be bent, the strong will trample on the weak and the powerful will sell the power he has to the needy so that both can increase their share of what really belongs to all. And the state will be as vulnerable as a conquered territory.

I thank you for listening.

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