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Nigeria country profile

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The end of the 20th century was significant for Nigeria in important ways, especially its return to electoral democracy in May 1999 after nearly 16 years of uninterrupted military rule. The return to representative democracy, as well as Obasanjo's second coming (after ruling as military head of state 1976-79 and highly respected for handing over to an elected regime)) was greeted with unbridled optimism of democratic dividends – progress in socio-economic, political and technological spheres, and overall national renewal – within and outside the country. It was especially symbolic in the context of massive human rights violations, political misrule, and gross mismanagement by successive military rulers, particularly the Babangida and Abacha regimes. In the 1990s, Nigeria, especially under the Abacha regime (1993-98), regressed to a 'pariah state', marked by suspensions and isolation from major international organizations and diplomatic fora. This was a striking descent from its esteemed frontrunner –'Giant of Africa' – status of the 1970s owing to its financial, moral, political and diplomatic support to liberation movements in Africa and international peace (through participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations).

Almost a decade afterwards, the optimism, hope and goodwill that accompanied the 29 May 1999 inauguration of Olusegun Obasanjo regime and democratic rule, has been replaced by pessimism and despair, not least by the myriad of complications and degeneration in inter-group relations, state-civil society relations, political

misrule and uncertainties, and impoverishing conditions. The post-military rule upsurge in riots, armed conflicts, insecurity, and corruption are derisively touted as the noticeable 'dividends' of democracy. The post-1999 realities actually show how the onset of the 21st century manifested and magnified the serious socio-economic and political challenges that characterized the Nigerian state since independence from Britain in October 1960. The post-military era exposed the acute problems of poverty, infrastructural decay, economic mismanagement, atrocious inter-group (ethnic and religious) relations and sub-national violence, political volatility, and threats of state collapse.

The scale of the challenges was hardly lost on the Obasanjo regime and this informed the post-1999 socio-economic and political reforms. The socio-economic reforms intensified the liberalization of socio-economic activities, the privatization of state assets, the aggressive stabilization of the macro-economic environment and indices, and emphasis on state regulation, as opposed to participation. This was a process kick-started in the late 1980s by the Babangida military regime with the adoption of the World Bank guided Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Politically, attempts were made to reform the electoral system (unsuccessful still), increase inter-group dialogue through a watered down national political reform conference, and unearth and correct past human rights violations through a Human Rights Commission (Oputa Panel). Civil-society groups that had been active in resisting military rule also widened the political space through multiple judicial and constitutional challenges that resulted in increases in the number of political parties, repeal of obnoxious decrees introduced under colonial and post-independent military regimes, and general increase in the openness of the public sphere.

However, the multiple neo-liberal reforms in socio-economic and political spheres have either failed or minimally succeeded having delivered only minute elements of set goals. In fact, manifested achievements through reforms and liberalization of socio-economic and political spaces have produced contradictory outcomes: increased economic growth and deepening poverty; and increased political freedom

and openness, and upsurge in atrocious inter-group and state-group violent confrontations.

The socio-economic reforms of the Obasanjo regime had mixed outcomes. On the one hand, there was a commendable measure of macro-economic stability – in inflation control, monetary policy and overall economic planning – and improvements in the telecommunication and financial (banking, insurance and capital market) sectors. The government also recorded domestic and international media acclaim for its anti-corruption campaigns and institutions. The 2005 special debt relief package negotiated by the Obasanjo regime, where over \$12 billion was paid to the Paris Club (in exchange for \$18 billion debt forgiveness) was greeted with applaud, as much as criticisms considering the country's level of poverty and infrastructural decay.

On the other hand, the aggressive roll-back of the state in development planning without the requisite infrastructure to attract, sustain and complement monopoly capital has exposed a majority of the population to the perils (shocks) of radical reforms, widespread poverty (over 70% of population living below \$1 per day), and socio-economic disempowerment. In addition, the anti-corruption campaign was largely selective and restricted to opponents of President Obasanjo and his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). To the extent that substantial allegations and complicity in cases of thieving, bribery, and sleaze characterized projects by the PDP government – a majority of projects were either poor implemented or not completed. Moreover, socio-economic infrastructures, centrally electricity and transportation structures, remain poor and decayed. In fact, large scale corruption, selective anti-corruption campaigns and poor planning accounts for the massive decay in transport and electricity infrastructures (very little to show for huge sums expended on the rehabilitation of roads and electricity dams). Overall, the socio-economic reforms remain institutionally weak, personality-driven, and failed to improve the basic living standards of most Nigerians.

Politically, the return to democratic rule has heightened the spectre of inter-group (sectional) and sectarian demands, suspicions, counter-accusations and armed conflicts. Of course, the emergence of sectional/ethnic militias dates back to the institutionalization of group-based, self-help strategies in the 1990s, directly to resist military rule and protect groups from military persecution. However, the post-1999 period witnessed an upsurge in the number of armed groups projecting sectionalist and even separatist agitations, and frequent confrontations with other militia groups and the Nigerian state.

The openness of the groups, and their actors, demands and activities parallel the perception and actuality of increased freedom and space to pursue self-help strategies. The mushrooming of ethnic-based youth militia groups across the country set off self-regenerating dynamics of negative inter-group competition, indexed by arms racing, balance of terror and casualty, and mirror-imaging among many of the estimated 250 ethno-national groups in Nigeria. In the Southwest, the Odu'a People's Congress (OPC) emerged and claimed to defend the socio-cultural, economic and political interests of the Yoruba nation. Similarly, the Ijaw National Congress, Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) emerged in the Southsouth to defend the socio-economic and political interest of the Ijaw nation, especially the increased control and share of oil and gas resources in the region. In the North, the Arewa People's Congress (APC) emerged to defend the socio-political interests of Hausa-Fulani nation in the context of perceived onslaught by co-ethnics.

These groups underline the complexities of Nigeria – multi-ethnicity and a huge population (140 million), a majority of which are youth (highlighting a youth bulge). The militias accounted for over 90 percent of armed conflict and violence in the post-military era, with damaging consequences for Nigeria's nascent democracy and socio-economic development. Between 1999 and 2003 alone, more than 50 cases of armed clashes leading to over 500,000 internally displaced persons and destruction of socio-economic infrastructures were recorded. The periodic clashes damaged the business environment, undermined investors' confidence, and

undercut the government's trumpeted model for development (founded on foreign investment). Between 1999 and 2007, the Obasanjo regime struggled to contain the orgy of violence, oscillating between accommodation and toleration, engagement and crackdown. The complex web of socio-cultural divisions; the politicization of identities, government appointments and policies; tenuous political alignment along ethnic divides; and the political survival/exigencies of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) restricted Obasanjo's ability to effectively manage or deal with the different militia groups.

More importantly, it was the politics of succession in the run-up to the 2007 elections that markedly defined the general perception of Nigeria's return to democracy, and Obasanjo's rule in particular. The politics of succession exposed multiple weaknesses in the internal structures of political parties, flawed electoral system and manipulated electoral commission, the complicity of security agencies in electoral malpractices, and the underdeveloped capacity to internalise the normative elements of good governance. Following a failed third-term bid (a fabled constitutional review process to allow Obasanjo stand for presidential elections for the third time), the president and PDP resorted to the skewed manipulation of the electioneering process through the intimidation and harassment of political opponents, arbitrariness and open support for incumbents by the electoral commission. The disregard for the rule of law translated into elections that were flawed and with pre-determined outcomes. For example, Obasanjo manipulated the electoral process (using the bogey of 'anti-corruption') to exclude/disqualify political opponents, most especially his former vice-president (Abubakar Atiku), until reversed by judicial pronouncements on the eve of elections, a time too short for the opposition groups to seriously challenge Obasanjo's handpicked successor (Umaru Yar'Adua).

Unintendedly, the flouting of constitutional provisions regarding elections has strengthened the oversight roles and powers of the judiciary through its assertive reversal of unconstitutional actions of the electoral commission and the voiding of

elections results. Still, the failure to observe appropriate electoral rules has resulted in heightened political uncertainties and disrupted governance.

Paradoxically, the domestic actions (failings) of the regime contrast sharply with the general reconciliatory, statesman and pro-democratic image and activities of Obasanjo on the continental and global arena, as evidenced by negotiated (arbitration by the International Court of Justice) settlement of the dispute with Cameroun over the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula; mediatory role in conflicts in Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sao-Tome and Principe, Togo, Zimbabwe, and Cote D'Ivoire; and a key actor in the search for improved socio-economic, political and security conditions in Africa (through the African Union).

By 2007, the domestic perception of Nigeria's return to democracy and Obasanjo's eight-year rule was that of a 'missed opportunity'- a regime of contradictions, waste and deception, and squandered goodwill and economic resources (high oil prices). In concrete terms, the regime became synonymous with democratic authoritarianism, political misrule and incompetence, economic mismanagement, corruption, and impoverishment of the population. Internationally, the flawed elections and Obasanjo's complicity was a 'let-down' and a bad precedent by Nigeria – a reversal of emerging consensus on democratic standards in Africa. Subsequent events on the domestic and African scenes have confirmed this view. On the domestic front, this is reflected in post-2007 reversal of elections by the courts, major cases of corruption involving the PDP and its chieftains, including Obasanjo, and waste of resources on the unimproved electricity and road infrastructures. On the African scene this is exemplified by similar rigging and manipulation of elections in Kenya. By the time of inaugurating the Yar'Adua administration in 2007, the Nigerian state stood a befuddling crossroad of economic growth without benefits to citizens, democratic rule without the rule of law, and freedom without security.

The Year 2007 in Review

The year 2007 was rich in political events, drama and dynamics domestically and internationally. The range of key events on the domestic scene revolved around the run-up and aftermath of the April 21 national elections. The intense speculation, politicking and jostling for political power within and outside the ruling PDP threw up issues of constitutional review, anti-corruption, rule of law, and judicial independence. We provide narratives of some of the key domestic and external events in 2007 and early 2008.

The Politics of Succession and Flawed Elections

The year 2007 began with the confirmation of Umaru Yar'Adua and Jonathan Goodluck as the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates of the ruling PDP for the April 2007 elections. The PDP eventually won the elections and its candidates installed in government. Both Yar'Adua and Goodluck were ruling PDP governors of Katsina and oil-rich Bayelsa states respectively, and emerged as preferred candidates on the strong support of president Obasanjo.

President Yar'Adua is from the politically popular and powerful Yar'Adua quarters (in Katsina state), with a history of involvement in Nigeria's politics. Umaru Yar'Adua is the son of a former minister (for Lagos Affairs) during Nigeria's first republic (1960-1966), and a junior brother to the late Major General Musa Yar'Adua, the erstwhile deputy to President Obasanjo when he was a military ruler between 1976 and 1979. Obasanjo's choice for Umaru Yar'Adua, notwithstanding his reported frail health, (kidney ailment) underscores the age-old familial linkages between Obasanjo and the Yar'Aduas (and the larger Hausa-Fulani political network in the north) that provided critical political support for Obasanjo as a military and elected ruler.

Vice President Goodluck is from the Southsouth geopolitical region and from the minority Ijaw ethnic group that has been agitating for increased political power and

representation, and control of oil wealth. Jonathan Goodluck became governor following the impeachment of DSP Alamiyeseigha over corruption charges (December 2005). Apart from being former governors, both candidates were also former university teachers, and neither openly campaigned nor aspired for the PDP candidatureship – were drafted (handpicked) into the race by Obasanjo.

However, the political dynamics in the run-up to 2007 are significant to the extent that they shaped the political landscape, power alignments and outcomes of the elections. In the first instance, Obasanjo was instrumental to the emergence of the duo following the defeat of the Constitutional Amendment Bill by the Nigerian Senate in May 2006 (following media and civil society outcry). The bill contained sections that would have allowed president Obasanjo to run for a third term in office. It was on this strength that Obasanjo played a central role in influencing the choice of his successor. The politics of succession within the ruling PDP led to the sanction, expulsion and intimidation of potential presidential aspirants to clear the path for Obasanjo's choice. The once influential Abubakar Atiku (Obasanjo's vice-president for eight years), a retired Custom Officer from Adamawa (northern Nigeria) and close ally of late Musa Yar'Adua, alongside other candidates (like Uzor Kalu from Abia in South-eastern Nigeria) were expelled from the PDP for 'anti-party' activities.

Anti-party activity was a term used to qualify acts and actions that ran counter to the choice and visions of Obasanjo, often packaged as decisions of the PDP hierarchy). Other candidates, including Jerry Gana, Aliyu Gusau and serving governors were either pressured to withdrawal or heavily undermined and defeated during the 16 December 2006 primary elections. Obasanjo, allied with other retired military officers (like Ahmadu Ali and Bode George who were Chairman and Vice Chairman of the PDP respectively), had taken control of the party machinery following a re-registration of party members shortly after the 2003 elections. The re-registration de-registered and ousted perceived and real opponents of Obasanjo from key party positions, and replaced them with Obasanjo loyalists. This proved

crucial in Obasanjo's ability to influence and veto the choice of PDP candidates for elections across the country.

Although some of the expelled members of the PDP founded new political parties (like Atiku's Action Congress – AC) that were among the over two dozen that contested the elections, the high number of opposition parties served to strengthen the PDP politically. Still, it is unclear if PDP's victory was actually due to its strength (better finances, national spread and its control of state resources and agencies) or outright manipulation of elections. In the run-up to the April elections, the anti-corruption agency set up by Obasanjo (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission – EFCC) was heavily manipulated and politicised by the president and the PDP to release names of people considered corrupt, even when not yet tried or convicted by a competent Court of law. The EFCC list included names of key opposition candidates (including Atiku and Kalu) contesting for elections at various levels, and became the basis for the disqualification of many opposition candidates by the electoral commission on the recommendation of an administrative panel set up by Obasanjo to investigate people for corrupt charges. In fact, it was a last minute judicial review by the Supreme Court that forced the INEC to include Atiku's name on the ballot paper. The PDP won about 75% of elective posts across the country, with Yar'Adua winning the presidency by an impressive margin.

The reports of local and international election monitoring and observer teams, and human rights groups document substantial flaws in the elections¹ – violence and intimidation of voters prior to and during elections, gross abuse of electoral process and laws, poor planning and logistics, vote rigging and hijacking of election materials, among many other things. These allegations and PDP's internal violations of electoral laws (by handpicking, imposing and replacing legitimately nominated candidates) with active collusion of INEC appear to be confirmed by the spate of judicial reversals of PDP victories post-2007. As at March 2008, the presidential election was being contested at the Supreme Court by Atiku (AC) and Buhari (All Nigeria People's Party – ANPP), while seven governorship results (six affecting PDP) had been voided by election tribunals across the country.

Embedded in the politics of succession was the complex and complicated issue of 'power rotation' (a euphuism for sharing political power between constituents). Under the 1999 Constitution, Nigeria was divided into six geo-political regions (Southwest, Southeast, Southsouth, Northeast, Northwest and North central), and there was an implicit understanding of political power rotating among the regions. The complexity of the power rotation convention was exposed by the contention over whether power needed to be between the larger North and South, or among the smaller six geo-political regions. The complexity was magnified by Obasanjo's background as a Yoruba from the Southwest and whose eight-year presidency symbolised southern or southwest rule. In the end, 25 candidates contested the presidential elections, with eight from the north and fifteen from the south. The victory of Yar'Adua appears to reinforce the North-South divide as the primary basis for power rotation. Overall, a salient positive outcome of politics in 2007 was the gradual, even if unnoticed, strengthening of key democratic institutions as the parliament, judiciary, media and civil society groups.

Anti-Corruption

One of major highlights of Nigeria's return to electoral democracy was the creation of anti-corruption agencies, centrally the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the EFCC in 2000 and 2004 respectively, by the Obasanjo administration. The agencies were necessitated by Nigeria's unenviable rating as one of the most corrupt countries in the World. In 1995, Colin Powell the former American Secretary of State infamously described Nigeria as a nation of scammers to underline the increased number of scams traced to Nigeria.² Indeed, advance fee fraud and other forms of scams (popularly called '419' in Nigeria) and official corruption are poignant 'legacies' (institutionalised practices) of successive military regimes, especially under Babangida and Abacha in the 1990s.³ A basic internet search on 'scams' reveals hits that expressly links it to Nigeria and Nigerians. In 1999, according to the global anti-corruption survey group,

Transparency International (TI), Nigeria was second to Cameroun among the 99 countries included in its corruption perception index. The country was rated most corrupt in 2000 and second most corrupt in 2001 and 2002. The EFCC estimated that more than \$380 billion of public funds was stolen or squandered by those in government between 1960 and 1999.⁴

The positive impact of the EFCC in the run-up to the 2007 election was noticeable in the country's delisting from the list of non-cooperative countries under the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT) initiative, and Nigeria's jump to 32nd position in the TI list of least transparent countries for 2007.⁵ The commission's pioneer chairman, Nuhu Ribadu easily became the anti-corruption czar in Nigeria and gained international recognition. The EFCC was proactive and responsive to unofficial corruption (scams and 419 activities) but has been ineffective in decisively curbing official corruption. However, it was the politicisation of the EFCC, notably its announcement of persons under investigation, mostly opposition politicians, in the run-up to elections that made the headlines in 2007. The use of the EFCC to harass, intimidate and disqualify opposition candidates generated widespread local and international condemnation, as much as compromised its independence, effectiveness and public perception.

For most part of 2007, the EFCC was accused of a selective war against corruption – the prosecution of opposition politicians, relative to its cosmetic action on allies of President Obasanjo and high-ranking PDP chieftains. Not unexpectedly, the post-Obasanjo era has witnessed the outbreak of cases of sleaze, thieving, and massive corrupt practices perpetrated by high-ranking PDP chieftains (under Obasanjo), with allegations of Obasanjo's complicity. The notable ones include the investigations of Willbros (USA) and Siemens (Germany) by their home governments for corrupt practices (bribery) in exchange for projects in their overseas (Nigeria) operations in late 2007. Overall, the events of 2007 and early 2008 (especially the veiled removal of Ribadu following his attempt to assert EFCC's independence by arresting PDP chieftains and former governors) reveal the immense limitations of the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria; weak institutional

basis, non-independence from incumbents of power and limited involvement of civil society groups. Undoubtedly, official and unofficial corruption remains a major obstacle to improving governance and socio-economic development in Nigeria.⁶

Economic Development

According to the Nigerian Central Bank, the country's economy grew by an estimated 6% to match growth patterns from 2004. The growth was fuelled by the continuous contribution and growth of the agricultural sector (put at 7%), as well as the expansion and increased foreign investment in the liberalised telecommunication sector (over \$10 billion invested as at 2006). Following the 2004 launch of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (a domestic version of the millennium development goals) the government also recorded noticeable macro-economic stability and better planning through time-bound targets and pathways to socio-economic development. This reflected in the successful recapitalisation of the banking, insurance and financial sectors, expansion of telecommunication networks and the restructuring and monetisation of public service. In 2007, several state-owned enterprises in sectors as telecommunication, oil and petrochemical refineries, steel and aluminium industries, insurance companies and state-owned houses were privatised to cut public expenditure and reduce the role of the state to regulation.

However, the raft of economic reforms and the savings from reduced external debts (debt relief deal) before and in 2007 have had limited impact, especially in improving the living standards of ordinary Nigerians with inflation still in double-digits (13.6% for 2007) and about 60% still impoverished. On the one hand, the growth rate was still below the 10% targeted under NEEDS. The limited growth is emblematic of the structural defects in the economy, especially its mono-mineral base – highly dependent on oil and gas as it contributes 20% of Gross Domestic Product and 95% of budget revenues. And on the other hand, corruption, poor planning and implementation have stalled socio-economic transformation. For

example, most of the privatised state enterprises were sold to cronies and allies (financiers) of the ruling PDP, often with flagrant disregard for technical competence. In fact, Obasanjo was reported to own majority shares in the company (Transcorp) that bought the state owned telecommunication outfit – NITEL.

Most importantly, critical infrastructure – electricity, transport (roads, rail and air), policing and micro credit facilities – are either unavailable or decayed, a situation that prevents real economic growth. For instance, about \$16 billion was spent on improving electricity supply between 1999 and 2007, yet power supply remains epileptic with the country only generating about 50% of the 6,130 megawatts installed capacity, and less than half of actual demands. Also, in spite of spending over N300 billion (\$2.2billion) on road transport infrastructure between 1999 and 2006, the country's 34,403 kilometres of road remain poor, accident prone and in some cases (the important Lagos-Ibadan-Sagamu network) near collapse. Admittedly, rail transport received some last-minute attention from the Obasanjo administration through a \$17 billion rail modernisation contract to Chinese firms to transform the country's 3,505 kilometres of rail line from narrow to standard gauges over a 25-year period. However, by the end of 2007, the Yar'Adua administration had begun a gradual review of some of Obasanjo's economic policies, including the reversals of privatised enterprises (refineries for instance) and doubts raised about the rail modernisation project (claims its funding arrangement violated fiscal and constitutional guidelines).⁷ It is even more befuddling that the unimpressive state of the economy, infrastructural decay and poor living standards are in the context of high oil prices (increased earnings).

Internal Security

Various forms of internal security challenges pervaded post-military Nigeria, not least ethno-religious riots and electoral violence. Understandably, the jostling for political power increased the cases of reported political and electoral violence in the build-up to the April 2007. For instance, the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey

(SAS) project identified 234 incidents of armed violence spread across 27 of the 36 states of Nigeria between December 2006 and March 2007.⁸ However, armed violence in the volatile oil-rich Niger Delta (Southsouth) region emerged as the most serious threat to internal security in 2007. Over the last decade, several armed groups have emerged in the region to protest against environmental degradation by oil multinationals, demand for larger share and control of oil resources and proceeds, and increased political power and representation by the region's ethnic minorities. Since 1999, the six states in the region have had their share of oil revenue increased from 2% to 13%, making them the richest states in Nigeria. Since 2006, the benefits of increases in global oil prices to Nigeria has trickled down to Niger Delta states, with some of them, Rivers for example, receiving over \$100 million per month as revenue. Also, the national government created the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to catalyse the region's socio-economic and environmental transformation.

However, the high levels of official corruption and political expediencies in the region and across Nigeria have stalled substantive progress in developing the region, with a majority of its people among the poorest in Nigeria and Africa. The interplay of poverty, genuine grievances, proliferation of small arms, youth restiveness and competition for power by cults and political elites has produced a combustible dynamic that make the region and its waterways one of most insecure in Africa. The level of violence and insecurity in the region in 2007 was amplified by increased bunkering, piracy, kidnapping (for ransom) and other criminal activities that often involved collusion with state agents, including high-ranking military officers. One conservative estimate puts the number of kidnapped persons between January 2006 and March 2007 at about 300; and the SAS observes that kidnappings increased in 2007.⁹ Also, the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) noted increased armed robbery attacks against ships in Nigeria's waterways (Niger Delta) from 6 in 2006 to 27 in 2007, making it the second least safe (behind Somalia) waterways in Africa.¹⁰

More importantly, the armed groups have coalesced under MEND and increased the intensity of attacks through a combination of hired foreign mercenaries and highly sophisticated weaponry.¹¹ This resulted in increased sabotage of oil and gas production by blowing up pipelines, attacking vessels and shutting-down flow stations. By the end of 2007, the Nigerian government stealthily acknowledged that MEND attacks had reduced oil production by up to 25% (a decline of 600,000 barrels per day) and a revenue loss of over \$4.4 billion.¹² The attacks and kidnappings fuelled the increased militarisation of the region through the government's deployment of a special security outfit – Joint Task Force (JTF) – and launched “Operation Restore Hope” to stem insecurity and protect oil installations. The Yar'Adua administration had showed increased willingness to engage the militant groups, as well as continuing Obasanjo's 'carrot and stick' approach. Still, the security situation in the region remains tenuous and volatile, and represents a major challenge to the socio-economic and political stability of Nigeria for years ahead.

Foreign Affairs

Nigeria continued its post-independence support for peace-building efforts in troubled spots within and outside of Africa. In the post-military era, President Obasanjo and Nigeria was actively involved in peace processes in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, and Comoros Island. The engagement involved supporting and hosting of peace talks, deployment of peacekeepers, assistance to post-conflict societies, and spearheading other African security and development initiatives. Indeed, Nigeria played a major role in reshaping the development, and peace and security architecture at the sub-regional and (through the Economic Community of West African States – ECOWAS) and continental (through the African Union's Peace and Security Council, and the African Standby Force - ASF) levels. Similarly, the country spearheaded new security initiatives in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea region through the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the

Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GGESS) designed to combat oil theft, piracy and maritime insecurity.

The most important event in 2007 concerns the debates, controversies and confusion generated by the February 2007 decision of the United States to establish a new Africa Military Command (AFRICOM). The creation of the command was a clear recognition of Africa's increased importance in global geo-strategic calculations, not least in anti-terrorism, narcotics, and energy security. For instance, the 2000 American National Intelligence Council report estimates that the Gulf of Guinea would supply 25% of American oil exports by 2015. The United States rationalised AFRICOM as a continuation of its military assistance and training programmes designed to enhance the capacities and capabilities of African countries in peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and disaster management.

Despite the stated novel intentions of AFRICOM, the proposal was randomly opposed by many African countries, especially the perceived and actual lack of consultation with African countries before its announcement and its limited interoperability with the ASF. The leadership role of Nigeria in Africa and its history of dynamic foreign policy, juxtaposed with its strong bilateral socio-economic and political relations with Washington meant Nigeria response to the AFRICOM proposal was ambivalent. So far, the Nigerian response has oscillated between rejection, acceptance, accommodation, and engagement. For instance, the Abuja government, in seeking to affirm its commitment to the ASF and the principle of 'African solutions for African problems', initially rejected the AFRICOM proposal, especially the prospect of American military bases in Nigeria or Africa. The potential of AFRICOM to undercut the 2010 plan for the ASF (built on brigades supplied by Regional Economic Communities - RECs) was cited as a major justification. However, following President Yar'Adua visit to Washington in December 2007 and in light of the regime's contested legitimacy at home, a more conciliatory response was given, perhaps after American restructuring of the AFRICOM plan to exclude military bases in Africa. Although the Nigerian government claims consistency in its policy (opposition) towards AFRICOM, the post-Washington visit indicated a shift

towards accommodation and engagement, especially in exploring the possibility of interlocking AFRICOM with the ASF initiative.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, armed violence, physical insecurity, poverty, corruption, infrastructural decay and political volatility remain critical challenges to the Nigerian nation. It is true that the political dynamics of 2007 has widened the political space and strengthened some democratic institutions. However, the normative element of democracy remains underdeveloped. Most importantly, the morale of ordinary Nigerians and their belief in existing institutions has ebbed considerably. Most continue to lament intriguing paradoxes of Nigeria: an oil producer that imports fuel, but cannot protect its citizens from the effects of high global oil prices; and the decay of infrastructure at the time the country is earning its highest ever revenues from oil. The severity of these challenges appears not to be lost on the new Yar'Adua government with recent pronouncements. However, like its predecessors, the real challenge lies not in diagnoses, but in translating the huge human, resource and financial potentials of the country into better living conditions, socio-political stability and increased security.

Endnotes

¹ See Report of European Parliament Election Observation Mission to Nigeria 2007, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/election_observation/missions/2004-2009/20070421_nigeria_en.pdf.

² For example, see "Lagos Journal; Nigerians Lament 'Locust' That Pick Nation Bare", The New York Times, 12 October 1995, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9402E5D91339F931A25753C1A963958260>.

³ Maier, K. (2000) *This House Has Fallen. Nigeria in Crisis*, USA: Westview, p. xxii.

⁴ Human Rights Watch (HRW), Nigeria: Fine. The Human Rights Impact of Local Government Corruption and Mismanagement in River State, Nigeria", Vol. 19, No. 2(A), p. 16.

⁵ For Global Corruption Perception Table, see http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007].

⁶ Smith, D.J. (2007) *A culture of Corruption. Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 12.

⁷ See "\$17bn rail project in jeopardy – Minister", Daily Trust Newspaper, Nigeria, 08 November 2007.

⁸ Hazen, J and Horner, J. (2007) Small Arms, Armed Violence and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective, Small Arms Survey Occasional Paper No. 20, p. 52.

⁹ Hazen and Horner 2007, p. 71.

¹⁰ See International Chamber of Commerce "Piracy attacks rise 14% as Nigerian and Somalian coasts become more dangerous", News Report, 16 October 2007, available at <http://www.iccwbo.org/iccbghha/index.html>].

¹¹ See "JTF uncovers mercenaries in militants' dens", Vanguard Newspapers, Nigeria (Online edition), 25 December 2007, available at <http://www.vanguardngr.com>].

¹² Hazen and Horner 2007, p. 15.