



NIGERIA
Development **or**
Underdevelopment



(Selected Seminal papers)

AKPAN EKPO

Chapter Twenty-One

HISTORICAL FUNCTIONS OF SOLDIERS IN THE SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

Since primitive communalism, persons have always found ways and means of protecting themselves against external aggression. In essence, the concept of a soldier (Army) has been associated with warfare, which often obscures the role of Army in peace times. In recent times, soldiers have had impact on the economic, social and political life of the society. In Nigeria, the role of the Army has been quite visible since 1960.

This paper examines the historical functions of soldiers in society drawing concrete examples from various historical epochs. In part I, we present a brief historical back-ground while in part II we periscope the functions of soldiers in the contemporary world. In part III, an analysis of the figure role of soldiers in Nigeria is made and some concluding remarks offered.

PART I: BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

We attach great emphasis on the presentation of history. The history of Africa must be written as the history of our society and not as the story of European adventures. The history of Africa must be a mirror of that society. Unfortunately, the history of a country is too often written as the history of its dominant class. History is a weapon and hence must be properly understood in the context of any phenomenon that is studied. More often the history of professional Armies (organised Army) in Africa is often viewed to have emanated through contact with Europeans.

African society must be treated as enjoying its own integrity, and the European contact must find its place in this history only as an African experience, even if as a crucial one. That is to say, the European contact needs to be assessed, and judged from the point of view of the harmony and progress of this society (Nkrumah, 1970, p.63).

In the 16th century, in West Africa, professional Armies were quite visible. The rulers at that time, in their bid to organize their societies, relied on irregular and temporary conscription of their subjects or their allies. In fact, in the 11th century, the Lords of Ghana could boast of enormous armies in the field by means of 'call-up'. "These were amateur armies. They served for a campaign or a war and then everyone went home until next time" (David and Buah, 1966, p. 186).

The growth of the executive powers of the 16th century West African rulers weakened traditional loyalty hence the rulers could no longer rely on part-time armies. Since their authority was increasingly questioned, they (rulers) needed soldiers who were outside the lineage network and would thus obey them without any complain. Hence, full-time armies developed side by side with the use of slave labour and slave officials. Another reason for the development of professional armies was that weapons of war became not only expensive but also difficult to handle. Firearms were difficult to buy and cavalry horses were expensive to buy and feed. Since men needed special skills to use them it became necessary to provide them with regular training.

Mai Idris of Kanem-Bornu in the 16th century imported musket and instructors from Tripoli and built up a little corps of musketeers. These were useful for various reasons: (1) they were professional soldiers. (2) They trained regularly with their weapons and (3) they were war-prisoners who had become the king's slaves. Askia Muhammed of Songhay Empire also had his own army-in-fact, he formed a full-time Navy on the Niger along the lines of his predecessor, Sunni Ali "A full-time army was raised and placed under the command of a full-time general, the dyini-koy or balama. The Askia also formed a full-time 'navy' on the Niger" (Davidson and Buah, 1966). This was done by including Niger boatmen in his amateur military system which eventually became its professional sailors.

The old Yoruba kingdoms raised full-time military units during this period. A little later special groups of professional warriors emerged in Ibo land. These included men who were capable and available to sell their war-making services to rulers. These professional soldiers were quite busy along great trade routes,

providing escorts for the caravans, defending markets, chasing off raiders, etc. In the case of Gonjo (Ghana empire), these soldiers helped to form new States (Dike, 1956; Ajayi and Smith, 1964).

It is a fact that during this period, war became more frequent and more destructive. Ordinary people suffered while professional armies reinforced the power of kings and governments.

This brief excursion into the West African past is to destroy the myth of a non-existent army before the coming of Europeans. The coming of the Europeans, like in the case of Nigeria led to the emergence of a colonial Army under British Rule.

On the other hand, organized armies in the European sense appeared as early as 300 B.C. It has also been documented that the first organized national army was that of Egypt which conquered Palestine and Syria about 1600 B.C (Coates and Pellegrin, 1950).

THE NIGERIAN CASE: COLONIAL ARMY:

Taking colonialism as a departure point, the present Nigerian Army was created, organized and trained under colonial tutelage. The Army evolved from one of the instruments of violence of colonial rule, the Nigeria Regiment of the Royal West African Frontier Force.

Under colonial rule, West African forces had been part of the British Army under the direct control of the British Army council. The West African Command was divided up in 1956 before the Independence of Ghana in 1957. "It was not until 1958, however, that the disposition and control of the Nigerian forces, together with their budget was transferred to Nigeria and even then the final authority of the operational control and use of the army remained with the colonial Governor General" (Luckman, 1975, p.231). In 1958 almost all the officer corps and a large portion of the NCOs were British but by the end of 1965, the entire officer corps was indigenized.

Hence, the functions of the colonial army were merely symbolic, internally that is. The army then served as a 'cooked-up' demonstration to the populace of the coercion of British rule.

External security came from the mother country (ie. Britain). However, during the First and Second World Wars, the British expanded the West African forces thus Nigerian and other African

troops were dispatched to fight as in far away Burma in the name of Britain. The experience acquired by Nigerians in the wars assisted the early nationalist leaders in their struggle for independence.

In the early Independence period (1960-1964), the army was to provide support for the new state, help maintain law and order and provide the ritual marks of sovereignty with military parades, march pasts and guards of honour. Governance was with civilians; essentially, the Army was to execute policies.

PART II: FUNCTIONS OF SOLDIERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

History is not only the analysis of past events. Historicism allows for the examination of past, and present phenomenon and in fact permits the collapse of both past and present in predicting future occurrences. By contemporary world, we are referring to modern nations of today and those nations that are trying to move forward. In today's world, two contending social systems dominate; one is capitalism and the other socialism. Under capitalism the private ownership and control of the factors of production is primary while socialism favours public ownership and control of the factors of production as well as the planned exchange and distribution of goods and services. Adding the word 'mixed' to any of the social systems cannot disfigure its true essence if properly studied and understood. Concrete examples of countries operating a capitalist system today include: the USA, Britain, West Germany, France, Kenya,* Nigeria*, etc. socialist countries consist of USSR, East Germany, Hungary*, Cuba*, Mozambique*, Angola*, etc. At the apex, the USA represents a developed socialist economy while the Soviet Union epitomizes a developed socialist economy.

In the USA, the government prepares and equips the Army for readiness against external aggression and for providing military power to her foreign policy. The Army is also trained ideologically to confront what is referred to as 'communist aggression'. Within the USA, the Army contributes to the political and economic life of the country. All USA Presidents were at one time in one of the Army forces. Policies are carried out and implemented after due consultation with the Pentagon. The USA military complex provides

* All developing or less developing countries

jobs for millions of Americans (civilians included) through its research and sale of arms and ammunition to developing countries. It is an established fact that the USA military expedition abroad stimulates growth and development within the economy through the multiplier effect. The USA system though civilian in outlook is coloured with military presence everywhere ideologically, the military (Army) is supposed to defend the beliefs and aspirations of the American ruling class whether it likes it or not. This is important because how a soldier feels is not a necessary and sufficient condition for disobedience. What matters is what the state feels. For example, there were a lot of Americans who did not feel like fighting in Vietnam but the nature of their training compelled them.

Moreso, they have been taught that they are defenders of and custodian of world freedom. United States invasion of Grenada, support of the Rebel in Angola and support for South Africa are few examples in recent times. America's recent aggression on Libya cements further this assertion.

The entire Army in the Western Hemisphere have formed themselves into blocs some of which are:

1. NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1947) consisting of USA, Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and West Germany.
2. SEATO - South East Asia Treaty Organization (1954) - USA, Britain, France, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan.
3. ANZUS - Australia, New Zealand and United States Treaty (1951); otherwise known as the Pacific Pact.
4. CENTO - Central Treaty Organization (1959) Britain, Turkey, Pakistan and Iran. This emerged from the 1955 Baghdad Pact. USA in 1959 entered into bilateral defence agreement with Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.
5. There have been negotiations on a South Atlantic Treaty Organization (SATO) which will include South Africa, Argentina, etc and the USA as the head.

This system of military blocs and alliances enable US

imperialism to exert de facto leadership not only over the entire Western World but over large area of Latin America and Asia. "This is achieved through an external network of some 2,200 bases and installations manned by approximately a million troops in readiness for war" (Nkurumah, 1972).

Africa is not spared from this 'historical function' of the Army (military) in the West. There are presently USA military bases in Kenya, Liberia and Egypt. France has military bases in Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon, Chad, Gabon and Ivory Coast. The West collaborates militarily with racist South Africa and other enemies of the African continent.

The Soviet Army was created out of the 1917 October Revolution "February 23 - the day forces of Germany imperialism were repulsed - is regarded as the birthday of the Red Army" (CPSU, 1939, p. 217). According to history, the old Army (tsarist) old social order. The Soviet Union built its defence first to consolidate its revolution and then to counter NATO offensive. The formation of NATO led to the signing of the Warsaw Treaty in 1954. The Warsaw Pact consists of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany Democratic Republic (East Germany), Poland, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Albania. An attack on any one member is regarded as an attack on all.

We have taken the two world powers with different social systems to show that the function of the Army has taken a wider dimension. For the USA and West, the primary aim is to defend and protect their economic interests and way of life; for the East, the fundamental objective is to defend the revolution. We have to ask whose interest is being defended because the society in which we live is a class society hence the interest of the nation must be properly understood in terms of the contending social forces.

A soldier is first and foremost a product of society. He/she is consciously or unconsciously serving society hence whatever is being done is for a particular class in society.

The two world powers have been engaged in arms control negotiation yet world's government has spent more than \$6 trillion for armaments since World War II. If one person spent \$10,000 a day for 365 days of the year, it would take more than 1,600,000 years to spend that amount of money.

Since 1948, world military expenditure in real terms has increased at an average annual rate of 4.5%. More than twice as large a portion of the world's total output now goes to military uses as did either the first World war or during the period between the first the second World wars (Johansen, 1974, p.4).

Mankind now spends yearly on military purposes an amount of resources that exceeds the world's total output at the start of this century (see table 1).

The military has been very active on the African scene both economically and politically. The arrival of the military in modern Africa was bound to happen given the structure of the various social systems in the continent. However, in the present day of Africa, the function of the Army must be located within a specific mode of production and also the term military must be defined in such a manner as to capture the various freedom Armies in the continent.

For several years the people of Ethiopia lived under one of the most oppressive regimes in the world. The late Emperor Hailie Salassie was so powerful that Ethiopians had to praise him even when they were being killed by his (Emperor's) soldiers. It took soldiers in conjunction with progressive civilians to alter the situation. There were at least two military regimes before the present one - reflecting the fact that even with the military there are different levels of consciousness and class alliances. Today, President Mengistu is attempting to build, a new life for Ethiopians by radically altering the old and decadent mode of production (capitalism) in favour of a new social order. (Socialism).

It is an open secret that King Idris oppressed and brutalized Libyans in order not only to entrench his rule but also to appease Italy, the United States and other imperialists. It was the young Colonel Gaddafi and his other comrades who liberated Libyans from oppression and exploitation. Today, most Libyans are guaranteed the basic necessities of life - food, clothings, shelter etc. A desert, has been transform into a land of honey.

In the West African sub-region, Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings and

Col. Thomas Sankara are trying to re-structure their economy (Ghana and Burkina Fasso) in the interest of the majority. These are all military men playing their historical function in re-shaping the conditions of their subject. They as individuals are not making history but for their people are making history with them (leaders) as the mouth peace.

The military that is conscious of its rule has an advantage, which is that of discipline within its ranks. Hence, when conditions are ripe enough for a change - the military can perform its historical and social functions by exploiting that advantage.

We must recognize that certain military formations in the African continent are different. Here, we are referring to those countries whose conventional Armies have grown out of liberation Movements (Freedom Fighters). The military in Mozambique and Angola for example are different from say Zambia and Nigeria because the bulk of the men and officers were engaged in a prolonged war of National Liberation against the Portuguese and other Western powers. Ideologically, the Armies in Mozambique and Angola have no choice but to defend the interest of the masses - the masses fought side by side with them during the liberation war. These types of Armies that are revolutionary are always ready to assist others fighting for freedom since they have learned from experience that such assistance is part and parcel of a people's struggle. A good example was when Cuban troops arrived in Angola in 1975 to defend the Angolan Revolution. The Cuban troops did it because the Army there was built out of a people's struggle. This analysis is not that non-freedom-fighting soldiers cannot become revolutionary - they can become.

At the other extreme, the military machine in South Africa is being utilized to kill, torture, maim and commit all kinds of atrocities against the black population. The rank and file within the South Africa Army is black, as was the case in Zimbabwe. There the Army is also playing a specific role as dictated by the ruling class in South Africa headed by Botha. This role is that of entrenching not only apartheid but also capitalist and imperialist exploitation. When freedom finally comes to South Africa as it is bound to happen, the Army will become the peoples Army. An Army borne out of the years of persistent struggle headed by the African National Congress

(ANC).

In Nigeria, the military has played and is still performing specific functions. As was noted above, if colonialism is taken as a departure point then the Nigerian Army emanated from the Royal Western African Frontier Force. Between 1960 and September 30, 1963, the military was still having allegiance to the Queen of England. From October 1, 1963, when Nigeria became a Republic, the word Royal was removed from all its Army Forces.

Though the Nigerian Defence Academy was opened in 1964 to train officers, it was staffed and organized by a military mission from India. Before this there was a decision to set up the Nigerian Military Training College to replace the officer cadet facilities previously available in Ghana. Cadets from this school were sent to England for further training at Sandhurst, Eaton, Hall or Mons (Kuckham, 1975). Essentially, the Nigerian military was being transformed gradually into a modern one. However, ideologically, the Army was bent towards Britain and other Western countries parties due to the colonial past.

On the Nigerian scene, the Army has been utilized to deal with threats real, or supposed to internal security. The Army assisted the police to quell riots in Tiv Division in 1960 and 1964. The Army also participated in quelling the former Western Region Crisis of late 1961 - January 1966. Between 1960 and early 1966, the then Prime Minister Alhaji Tafawa Balewa had an increasing authority hence the army's role was minimal and only acted when called upon to do so by the Commander-in-Chief (Prime Minister). It must be noted that the Nigerian Army in 1964 assisted President Nyerere to hold on to power after the Army mutiny in Tanzania - this was a boost to the then Prime Minister's foreign policy, it also re-awakened the Army that they could travel far away to implement the policy of government. Nigerian Army also participated in the United Nations peace-keeping force in the then Congo (now Zaire) crisis.

The visible appearance of the Army in politics in Nigeria could be traced back to the January 1966 coup. After six years of political independence bribery, corruption, and tribalism superficially characterized the economy. The Nigerian Army then attempted to arrest the situation but 'failing' to understand that the problems of bribery, corruption, tribalism etc. were derivatives of

the capitalist mode of production.

According to the late Major Nzeogwu:

We wanted to get rid of rotten and corrupt ministers, political parties, and trade unions and the whole clumsy apparatus of the Federal system (Luckham, 1975, p.32).

Since 1966, the Army has been in politics except the 1979 - 83 interregnum of the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. It seems to us that the Army in Nigeria has good intentions in coming to power especially since the military risked their lives in preserving this country during the 1969 - 1970 civil war. On the other hand, the seizure of power has not gone beyond nationalism - the interest on the Nigerian State. But the state is not an homogeneous group. The state represents the rule of one class against another - it is a manifestation of class antagonisms. The preservation of Nigeria must be in the interest of those that produce the wealth.

Hence, the Army comes to power, that is, all previous military regimes, its good intentions vanish because of its inability to positively solve the country's problems through radical transformation. Invariably, consciously or unconsciously the Army finds itself - repeating the mistakes of the past because of not transcending nationalism. It therefore finds itself preserving the status - quo and the prevailing social system.

The present military regime has the responsibility of putting Nigeria into the part of total economic and political emancipation by laying the foundation for a truly egalitarian society. One way of achieving this is to critically examine the present social system with a view of altering it to a more just and humane society. This way, the Army would have performed its historical function to the Nigerian people.

The Army needs to interact socially with the rest of the people. This could be done through seminars such as this and other events that will integrate the Army the rest. In countries like China, the Army is usually mobilized through its various corps in the construction of roads, bridges and other infrastructures. The Army with civilians could be involved in various research projects in any

aspects of the Nigerian economy. While it is a fact that some of these are being done, more of them will augur well for the nation.

PART III: NIGERIA: THE FUTURE AND THE ARMY

The future is in itself a part of history. Nigeria's future and that of the Army or any other military force are organically linked. On the economic front, an aggressive military industrial complex could provide the necessary impetus for growth and development of the country. The expansion of the defence industry to produce not only arms and amunitions but also social goods and other items, for example, tractors would go a long way in economic independence. Military expenditures and its share in both total expenditures and gross national product are presented in Table 1 next page.

Beginning 1971, military expenditures have increased steadily except for few years where slight decline in expenditures were registered. The ability to produce most of what is being imported would not only save the scarce foreign exchange but will increase domestic output and employment. The share of expenditures to GNP has been stable over the years except the civil war, 1967 to 1970 Table 1).

The various skills been produced in the Army will become part of the stock of Nigeria's high manpower. When and after their enlistment, the men and women would continue to contribute to the country's growth and development. It is precisely for this reason that the training and retraining of officers and men of the Army forces should continue.

Nigeria is presently debating her political future and the Army must be involved since they are products of the society at large. We disagree with those who feel that the Army should stay clear of politics. The Army must be fully aware of any political structure in which they may be called upon to defend with their lives. We only know that this role can be correctly performed if the objective is that of lifting millions of Nigerians from poverty and underdevelopment. It is only when the Army is politically involved, correct consciousness, that is, that it would see the need to fight on the side of oppression. South African is a good example.

Table 21.1: Nigeria: Military Expenditure, Gross National Product and Respective shares, 1966 - 1984

Year	Expenditures (N million)	Military Exp. As % of Total Expenditure	Military Expenditure As % of GNP
1966	112.0	-	1.35
1967	285.0	-	3.2
1968	437.0	-	5.1
1969	861.0	-	8.7
1970	696.0	-	5.9
1971	570.0	-	4.3
1972	701.0	-	5.2
1973	773.0	-	5.0
1974	846.0	-	3.8
1975	977.0	-	4.6
1976	593.2	18.0	2.0
1977	608.3	18.0	1.9
1978	1,304.6	10.5	4.4
1979	1,185.8	5.0	3.8
1980	1,758.5	12.2	5.7
1981	1,140.3	10.0	3.9
1982	1,042.1	6.1	3.7
1983	1,090.2	6.8	4.0
1984	928.2	5.8	3.6

Source: Computed from:

- (a). Central Bank of Nigeria. Annual Report And Statement of Account, Various Issues.
- (b). United States Army Control and Disarmament Agency. World Military Expenditures And Arms Transfers, 1966 -75, Washington DC. 1976.

Notes on Table:

- 1 1966 - 1974 in Milton US\$. Expenditures include both capital and recurrent.
- 2 1966 - 1974 from source (b) above.

We suggest that Nigerians, male and female be given military training for one year after their seventeenth birthday. Other Nigerians may volunteer to do same. It is an important function of the Army to get its citizens ready for combat in case of any foreign aggression. The racist Republic of South Africa defines its defence zone as including the whole of Sub Saharan Africa; this makes Nigeria a possible target hence the necessity to have citizens that could be called up in case of any emergency.

CONCLUSION:

We have attempted to examine the historical functions of soldiers in society drawing from world, African and Nigerian examples. We have demonstrated that the notion of professional armies existed in Africa prior to European penetration and colonialism. It was also argued that the military apart from protecting the society against foreign intervention performs important economic, political and social functions during peace times.

We have alluded that a politically conscious Army serving the interest of the majority in any society can emancipate such a society from the state of poverty and underdevelopment.

There is no doubt that the Army, other Armed forces and progressive Nigerians can work together not only to transcend nationalism but work for a New Nigeria where the exploitation of man by man is not only put to rest but never given an option.

Long live the Nigerian Army
Long live Nigeria