

AGAINST THE RUN OF PLAY

*How an incumbent President
was defeated in Nigeria*



OLUSEGUN ADENIYI

*Author of the acclaimed book,
Power, Politics and Death: A front-row account of Nigeria
under the late President Yar'Adua*

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To the memories of Mr Felicia Ejide Adeniyi and Chief (Mrs) Elizabeth
Funmilayo Adebayo, and to all mothers.

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FOREWORD

The Nigerian polity is fast emerging as Africa's leading commonwealth of independent-minded and very rowdy political animals. Wherever you go – on the streets, in barbers' shops, open air barbecues, street markets, board rooms, community gatherings, public television viewing centers etc. – you cannot but encounter this raucous roving parliament that is perpetually in session. Its membership consists of assorted iconoclasts, party converts, crackheads, agnostics, fanatics in search of a faith, at-heart ethnic foot soldiers, perpetual drunkards and veterans of all known wars from the Second World War to the anti-Boko Haram savannah rout.

In nearly everyone of these gatherings across the length and breadth of this vast, impossible country, active open dissections and excoriations of the government of the day is on rowdy display, capped often by all manner of harebrained solutions and scenarios on how best to govern and impose order on one of the world's most problematic federations. I call this place 'the land of a hundred million presidents' without an authentic sovereign because everyone other than the elected president knows what is to be done. In trying to process this cacophony, nothing tangible ever gets done.

Our interest in who is elected 'what' at every epoch seems to be the driving force of our democracy. But in fairness, our interest in democracy at election time especially is nearly as keen as our fanatical followership of European league football, its major clubs and star players.

Ordinarily, one would expect such a national gaze on political developments to reflect fundamental disagreements on issues along clear ideological lines. After all, we have collectively experienced Nigeria long enough to have by now made healthy choices as to what route leads quickest to

the harvest place. Sadly, that is not the case.

In Nigeria, political parties change and increase in number every election season. The acronyms that distinguish them are ideologically empty. They are merely arrangements among friends or strange bedfellows for the sake of cornering state power at regional, state, local government or federal levels for the purpose of distributing patronage and pork. Beyond the drama of electioneering and the ritual of voting, our democracy delivers almost no positive change in the lives of citizens. But the people still seasonally suspend disbelief and follow the politicians almost with religious fervor. We elect them at these seasonal festivals and thereafter, leave them to feast on our commonwealth for another four years.

Even then, it is gratifying to note that in recent years, something positive is beginning to happen. The support of national politicians at election time has moved away from purely ethnic and geo-political considerations to matters of shared interests and bread and butter across ethnic barriers. The economic well-being of ordinary people has in recent times assumed increasing importance in electoral choices of key national political offices, especially the pre-eminent one of President.

Since 1999 when formal democracy returned to displace barrack politics, the popular 'all Nigeria parliament' has become even more sophisticated. It is aided by the mushrooming of myriad media outlets ranging from every conceivable print title to multitudes of FM and AM radio stations and assorted digital and analogue television stations. The explosion in the power of the people to debate and influence what happens in the management of their lives has been aided by the emergence of the internet.

This is the age of instant information, disinformation and post truth. Fact, fiction, outlandish lies and 'alternative facts' mix and meet in a new amorphous reality in which the truth may have disappeared for all time. Every man is now an information hub, a reporter, editor, commentator, publisher and carrier of

value judgments.

In this cacophony of information and a super active and even treacherous political jungle, it is easy to lose track of the significant trend of events. Collective amnesia is the hallmark of a bad political culture. Yet, when politicians forget what happened before, the tendency is for them to make the same mistakes over and over. And Nigerian politics suffers from a disturbing epidemic of chronic amnesia. We forget what we choose not to remember in order to take advantage of the loopholes in the present.

One graphic way of putting it would be that Nigerian politicians have the appetite of elephants but the memory of mice. Our national political memory is short and mostly undocumented, because the political events themselves are suffused in hearsay and myths. Our politicians hardly keep diaries let alone write memoirs. They play it as a game, albeit an unserious one disconnected from any commitment to national history and goals. On their part, most of our journalists are obsessed with reporting and commenting on politics as part of the journalistic tradition of history in a hurry. They report the events, momentarily celebrate or vilify the actors before moving on to other ‘breaking news’!

Here then lies the enduring significance of Olusegun Adeniyi’s new book, *‘Against the Run of Play: How an incumbent president was defeated in Nigeria’*.

Adeniyi, whose journalistic and writing career I have followed keenly and closely over the years, has an unusual historical consciousness that is foregrounded in the intricacies of Nigeria’s troublesome political culture. In the process of documenting the important milestones and developments, he has gradually emerged as arguably the foremost and most credible chronicler of Nigeria’s contemporary political history and evolution. But he approaches this necessary national assignment from the perspective of an active journalist, not that of a professional academic historian.

Instructively, Adeniyi focuses the attention of the public on those important moments in national history that we dare not forget to remember. These are those moments when we have all held our breath, as a people, to ponder whether in fact the nation we have come to love and cherish can survive a particular crisis. We witness this from his books on aspects of the drama of the late Bashorun MKO Abiola's ill-fated presidential election and the anachronism of an elected legislature under a military government (*Abiola's Travails*¹ and *POLITRICKS: National Assembly Under Military Dictatorship*²), the emergence of the late General Sani Abacha's gulag autocracy (*The Last 100 Days of Abacha*) and his first hand experience of power at close quarters as spokesman for the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (*Power, Politics and Death*).

Adeniyi's books on these critical and transformative national moments are not just disinterested chronicles. A reporter par excellence, his eyes and ears are tuned to the stories as they unfold and the actors in the ever-shifting drama of political horse-trading and deal making. He does not just report and move on. He reports, takes note of the major landmarks and decisive turns and twists and preserves these events of history in a hurry to be retold for posterity. In the process, he identifies the key persona and their roles.

There is also a sense in which his newspaper columns constitute a continuation of his historical consciousness portrayed and betrayed in these books. In his columns, he distils the highpoints of the here and now in order that his audience could make sense of them. The backdrop is always his experiences and the vast exposures to key players that his chosen career has facilitated over these years.

This book, '*Against the Run of Play*', then, is a continuation of this intense but selective historical gaze at Nigerian politics by an engaged journalist. The moment at issue is the precarious one when an entrenched political party³ was

defeated in a presidential election after 16 unbroken years in power. What lent additional momentum to this event is that an incumbent Nigerian leader had the common sense to cede power through an uncharacteristically gracious telephone call to congratulate the winner.

In a continent where leaders have cultivated perpetual tenures that sometimes last decades or even life times, this development in a country of Nigeria's demographic and strategic gravity is of great significance. If the American President is regarded as the most powerful office in the world, then clearly, the Nigerian President is no doubt the most powerful office in the whole of Africa. The magnitude of resources the office controls as well as the sweep of its power over so large a population justifies this conclusion. Therefore, the stakes are so high that to cede it through a mere phone call becomes an act of heroism; hence, former President Goodluck Jonathan has been conferred some form of immunity from his pitfalls in office.

What makes the concession of Jonathan so important for Nigeria, however, is the unimaginable consequences that would have greeted the contrary development. The clear and present danger was that the nation would have been plunged into a civil war with religious, geo-political and even class dimensions. Clearly, the very survival of the Nigerian nation would have been put to serious test with huge human losses.

The importance of '*Against the Run of Play*' is that it offers a narrative explanation of the defeat of President Jonathan from the perspective of a reporter. It offers the reader an unusual insight into the major human and institutional factors that led up to this defeat as well as the key persona who facilitated it. Equally important is the author's detailed recall of the major political developments that made the outcome inevitable, while shaping the very expectations that brought President Buhari to power. Adeniyi enhances the credibility of his narrative through an extensive set of interviews with living key players in the drama he relates. The hindsight of these key players throws

the events into bolder relief and illuminates the road ahead.

In this important book, the narrative is arresting in its fluidity. Political intrigue begins to read like ‘whodunit’ while political actors behave like characters from pulp fiction gangster chronicles. Politicians act mostly out of self-interest and narrow short-term calculations rather than far-sighted national goals. Hardly any of the major players in the drama of intrigues in this book display any serious commitment to national ideals or even a pan-Nigerian vision. Nor do we encounter a single individual politician whose stake in the power struggles is fired by any ideological convictions on how best to develop Nigeria.

The politicians in this book are Northerners, South-Southerners, Niger Deltans or South-Westerners etc. as the case may be. Interestingly also, hardly any of the leading politicians in contention invokes the ideals or vision of the founding fathers to foreground their actions. They have no political ancestry, being mostly political orphans with no solid convictions or even ethical moorings or moral qualms whatsoever. In quite a number of cases, the major political actors possess no credible educational qualifications. Most are in politics because there is nothing else to do: businesses have failed, professional practices have collapsed and unemployment has often driven many to the limits of creative survival. They therefore act mostly in pursuit of their immediate personal or small group interests. All eyes seem to be fixated on the national treasury, the giant cheque book of oil royalties.

In a curious way, this book is more than an explanation for the smooth transition of power from one democratically elected administration to another or from an African ruling party to an opposition party. In identifying the factors that powered the Muhammadu Buhari ascendancy in 2015, it also contains enough suggestions about the forces that will determine the life span of his presidency.

By some historical accident, ‘*Against the Run of Play*’ is going to press at

the mid-term of the Buhari presidency. Fortuitously, this moment happens to coincide with an unanticipated development in the life of the administration. As at this writing, President Buhari is on medical vacation in London. He has been gone for over a month while the precise nature of what ails him and the duration of this vacation remains shrouded in official veil. Nigerians are shocked into a cruel analogy between his plight and that of the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, also from Katsina State, whose medical vacation ended in his tragic death.

In spite of the emplacement of Vice President Yemi Osinbajo as Acting President, the mood of the nation is one of uncertainty and fear of the unknown. The fears around Buhari's health situation re-echo some of the fears crudely expressed by those who were opposed to his candidacy in the campaigns preceding the 2015 presidential elections. This uncertainty throws into greater relief the events that preceded Buhari's second coming. Here then is a book whose timing seems to be historically point blank.

Thus, beneath the seductive arrest of the fluid narrative, the topicality of the subject, the potential for controversy among politicians and the overall historical import of this book, lies something hidden and most useful. Its enduring value lies curiously in what it reveals about the contradictions now bedeviling the Buhari administration and may vitiate the excitement of its ascent. This important book may be a reaffirmation of the old historical truism that each epoch in its rise also contains the seeds of its own demise.

No one has put it better than the cultural philosopher and literary theorist, Walter Benjamin, "Every epoch not only dreams the next...it bears its end within itself, and reveals it by a ruse."

Chidi Amuta

Lagos

23 February, 2017

- [1](#) A book on how between 1992 and 1994, the late Bashorun M.K.O Abiola joined politics from business, campaigned to be president, won an election that was annulled by the military and ended up in prison.
- [2](#) A book on how the National Assembly was inaugurated under a military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, the underlying tension it generated and the debate by the lawmakers following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election.
- [3](#) The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was in power at the centre from 1999 until its defeat at the 2015 general elections.

INTRODUCTION

The drama unfolding at The Villa on 31st March 2015, four days after the presidential election, would have profound implications for President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and the nation he led. Kneeling in front of Jonathan were his Attorney General and Justice Minister, Mr Mohammed Bello Adoke, SAN; Aviation Minister, Mr Osita Chidoka and Special Assistant to the President on Domestic Affairs, Mr Waripamo-Owei Dudafa.

The mission of the three officials was to persuade Jonathan to call to congratulate his opponent, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd) of the All Progressives Congress (APC), even as the final results were still being collated by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Seated a few metres away in the room were Vice President Namadi Sambo; Akwa Ibom Governor, Mr Godswill Akpabio; Executive Secretary of the Nigerian Christian Pilgrims Commission, Mr John Kennedy Opara and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

Chidoka had co-opted Adoke and Dudafa to make the plea after a conversation he had with Jonathan the previous day. The president had acknowledged that the results were going against him and that he was going to concede. This was at a period when Nigerians were unsure of who would win, with many politicians within the then ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) still betting on Jonathan. He, meanwhile, had already asked Chidoka and a few others, including his spokesman, Dr Reuben Abati, to give him a draft concession speech.

For Jonathan, coming to terms with defeat was the culmination of what began four days earlier, when he arrived at a polling unit in his hometown of Otuoke, Bayelsa State with his wife, Dame Patience for accreditation to vote

under the full glare of the media. The country watched on live television as one card reader after another failed to read the president's biometrics. After four tries and close to about 20 minutes, Jonathan and his wife had to be accredited manually.

Despite his earlier misgivings about the use of card readers for the election, which was also opposed by his party, Jonathan resisted the temptation to chip at the credibility of the exercise by graciously reaffirming his confidence in the process. "President Jonathan is just one person," he told reporters. "So, if we have problem with one person, as far as the election is going on well nationally, I'm not worried that there might be a delay. My interest is that we conduct a credible election."

It was the first defining moment of the election. A disgruntled reaction could have easily set the wheels of political discord in motion and truncated the peace that had characterized the exercise up until that point.

However, by Monday, 30th March, the atmosphere around Jonathan had been soured by reports suggesting the election may not have been as free and fair as he initially thought, especially in some of the northern states. With photographic evidence, Jonathan was shown how underage people were allowed to vote at some polling units in Kano and Bauchi states. This inflamed those within the government who were urging Jonathan not to concede, even as it became increasingly clear that he had lost.

The general feeling within The Villa, a view fervently shared by Jonathan, was that the INEC Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega, was part of a "northern conspiracy" against him. With that, Jonathan decided to keep all options open. This emboldened some of his supporters who were desperate enough to want to disrupt the election.

Among the strongest arguments for a potentially rigged election were the results from Kano State. Jonathan himself admitted as much to me in the course

of our lengthy chat, saying, “Go and check the results from Kano. The presidential election and that of National Assembly happened on the same day and same time. The National Assembly result reflected that about 800,000 people voted but that of the presidential reflected a vote of about 1.8 million. I had reports of what happened but I decided that for such to be accepted, it meant that those who called themselves my supporters must have colluded. I was betrayed by the very people I relied on to win the election.”

However, Prof Mohammed Kuna, Special Assistant to Jega, begged to differ. “There is nothing particularly special about the Kano result; it is a general trend as many voters were more interested in the presidential election than in other elections. That was what happened across the country and you can go and do the tabulation,” argued Kuna, who maintained that the use of card readers had made the election more difficult to rig. “With the card reader, it is no longer possible to return results that are higher than the accredited voters. If you analyse the results nationally, you will discover the same trend.”

Despite his misgivings, by the time it became evident that he had lost, Jonathan was left counting the cost. “In 2011 when Buhari did not campaign anywhere and could not have won the election, there was a spontaneous violent reaction that led to the death of several innocent people, including youth corps members,” Jonathan reflected. “I asked myself: what would happen in a situation in which there was already internal and international conspiracy in his favour? I could not bear the thought of anybody dying, so I told myself I had only one option and that was to concede.”

There were many around Jonathan who did not share his sense of magnanimity. Tuesday, 31st March 2015 was therefore a dramatic day, with the abortive attempt by the Niger Delta Minister and ally of the president, Elder Godsdan Orubebe, to disrupt proceedings at the INEC collation centre, a spectacle that unfolded on live television. Although he would later apologise for his misadventure, Orubebe’s histrionics were part of a grand plan to

disrupt the election, a plot that failed essentially because other parties involved refused to play to the script.

While Jega did not have the exact details of what would happen, he had nonetheless been alerted to the fact that there would be a disruption in the process, including a kidnap threat. “On arrival at the collation centre that morning, we discovered that the gate between the International Conference Centre and NICON Luxury Hotel, which was always locked, had curiously been opened,” recalled a security officer detailed to work with Jega. A decision was immediately taken for the INEC Chairman not to leave the collation hall under any circumstances.

Jega’s handlers proposed a live television feed of the electoral commission’s activities so that whatever happened, the whole world would witness it. In the security official’s narration, “Of course, Jega is usually a calm person, but given what he already knew, there was no way he was going to (take) the bait of Orubebe who kept shouting, ‘Jega, go to your office!’ We knew what the whole plan was about and had resolved not to play into their hands.”

Meanwhile, at The Villa, the drama was also being watched on television. While the outcome must have deflated the hawks around Jonathan who were still looking for a way out of the looming defeat, it worked in favour of those who wanted him to concede before the final tally of the results. With Orubebe’s antics dealt with by Jega, INEC continued to process the results from the remaining states.

Chidoka pleaded, “Why don’t you take the wind off Jega’s sail? By calling Buhari, you would have rendered whatever INEC is doing redundant.” This school of thought won the day. At one point, Dudafa stood up and said loudly to Jonathan, “Daddy, anybody can say whatever they like but we are leaving this house on May 29. You have done your best for Nigeria and the people will appreciate your sacrifices.”

Shortly thereafter, Jonathan got up from his seat and went into his study where he picked up the phone and asked ‘Control’⁴ to get Buhari on the line. He spoke briefly with Buhari, in a rather nervous tone, and then came out to announce to those in the room that he had conceded and congratulated the APC candidate on his victory.

A relieved Chidoka asked, “Can I tell the world?”

“Go ahead,” Jonathan directed, and Chidoka sent out a tweet from his mobile phone at exactly 5.23PM, Nigerian time.

And with that call, Jonathan pulled Nigeria back from the precipice, saving the country from what would have been a serious crisis, the ending of which nobody could have foretold. But the story did not end there. There were still attempts by some persons close to the president to use the party hierarchy to fight the outcome of the election. “After President Jonathan had accepted defeat, congratulated Buhari and the whole world was acclaiming him, some party leaders and governors now wanted me to release a press statement that would ridicule me before civilized people and cause serious problems for our country,” the then PDP National Chairman at the time, Alhaji Ahmed Adamu Mu’azu⁵ told me.

Looking back, there are many hanging questions. Was the concession a jump or a push? If the former, was it out of altruism? If the latter, was Jonathan coerced by some Western powers as insinuated in some quarters? Did he simply concede out of a personal conviction that it was the right thing to do, having been defeated at the polls? Even more importantly, against the backdrop of the pervasive notion that it was virtually impossible to defeat an incumbent Nigerian president with all the resources at his disposal, how did Jonathan lose the election?

Writing this book presented the complex challenge of finding out what exactly happened. I spoke to as many of the actors as possible and went back

to corroborate what each had told me in the light of new revelations from others. In choosing the title, I had pondered on a lot of things. It was not only about the defeat of an incumbent president, however unprecedented that may be in Nigeria, but also the fact that he conceded so quickly, something that was also unprecedented and unexpected.

The pre-election rhetoric was dominated by threats of violence. Many members of the political and business elite had either relocated their families abroad or prepared to move them once crisis erupted. The situation was not helped by a controversial statement which emanated from the presidency seven weeks to the election that, “Buhari can never be President of Nigeria. Quote me any day any time. Instead of Buhari to become President of Nigeria, Nigeria would rather break. A military coup will even be allowed than for Buhari to become the president of a democratic Nigeria; quote me any day, any time.”⁶

While the statement was quickly disavowed following a public outcry, there is a way in which Orubebe’s actions at the INEC collation centre slotted perfectly into that narrative. For instance, Mr Rotimi Amaechi recounted to me an encounter he had a few days to the election at Heathrow Airport in London with a close supporter of Jonathan from Bayelsa State who told him, “Amaechi, when are you people in the APC going to stop this joke? Let us, at least for the sake of argument, agree that Buhari wins the election; do you imagine for a second that Jonathan will be foolish enough to hand over the presidency to him? Have you ever seen such a thing happen in Nigeria? You people should wake up from your pipe dream.”⁷

However, the presidential election was lost and won even before the first ballots were cast, essentially because it had been defined as a referendum on the incumbent. But the loser also, for the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria, congratulated the winner, and that was not part of the script. Almost two years on, it is clear that the expectations that fuelled the change of

government have not been met. Against the background of the health challenge that kept President Buhari in the United Kingdom for 51 days, with hints that he would need further medicals abroad, there is already a feeling of despondency, with no certainty as to how it will all play out.

Although each of the actors interviewed for this book spoke from their own perspective, it is easy to glimpse from their narratives the political dynamics that combined to oust an incumbent president in Nigeria, as well as why there was only one sensible option after the votes were in. In the final analysis, there are several lessons to draw, not only for the beneficiaries of Jonathan's defeat, who are now travelling the same hard road, but also for those who seek to understand the pitfalls of power within the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious African country.

Olusegun Adeniyi

Abuja

10th March, 2017

[4](#) Control is what the Aso Rock telephone exchange room is called.

[5](#) I documented what transpired between Mu'azu and then Akwa Ibom

Governor, Mr Godswill Akpabio and his Cross River State counterpart, Mr Liyel Imoke, in my column, "Inside The PDP Tower of Babel", published in THISDAY on 7th May, 2015.

[6](#) A Blackberry Messenger (BBM) statement by Deji Adeyanju, an official in the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Public Affairs, Dr Doyin Okupe, in February 2015 which drew sharp reaction from the opposition, essentially since the official in question was handling Okupe's Twitter handle.

[7](#) Then Rivers State Governor, Chairman of the Nigeria Governors Forum and Director General of the Buhari Campaign.

CHAPTER ONE

2011 AND THE HARD BARGAIN

The session had been convened by the leadership of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) with a single item on the agenda: the intention of the then incumbent President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, to contest the party's presidential primaries for the 2011 general election. This was against the background of an unwritten zoning agreement that the vacuum left by the death, on 5th May 2010, of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, could only be filled by another northerner.

The PDP National Chairman, Dr Okwesilieze Nwodo who presided over the meeting held at the First Lady's Conference Room within the Presidential Villa, made a strong statement that swayed many people in the room and was set for adoption had he not yielded the floor to Chief Ombo Isokrari⁸. Because he stammers, Isokrari spoke with force, but it was not so much the manner of speaking that caused the problem but what he said.

Isokrari prefaced his remark with the statement that he was speaking not in his private capacity but on behalf of the people of the Niger Delta⁹ whose son, he argued, should be allowed to contest the 2011 election. Isokrari then added for effect that Jonathan also had a right to seek a second-term in 2015. This elicited an immediate uproar. But just before his voice was drowned by a cacophony of angry retorts, Isokrari said that in the event his idea was not accepted and Jonathan's tenure ended in 2015, then the Constitution of Nigeria would have to be amended so that all future presidents would only serve a single term of six years.

Given the reactions from many of the northern politicians at the meeting,

Brigadier-General Samuel Ogbemudia (retd)¹⁰ had to intervene. He began with the clarification that Isokrari's position did not represent that of the South-South, before pleading that circumstances beyond the control of the people in the room had thrown up a son of Niger Delta as the president of Nigeria. He asked that, as a gesture to reciprocate all the support the people of the zone had always given northern politicians in the past, Jonathan should be allowed to complete the presidential tenure of the late Yar'Adua, on which ticket he came to power, as enunciated by Nwodo in his opening remark.

Perhaps to defuse tension, Ogbemudia added that the 1999 Constitution in operation made provision for a President of Nigeria to be sworn in only twice and since Jonathan had been sworn-in, first in May 2010 to take over after the death of Yar'Adua, 2011 would mark a second and final swearing-in. By Ogbemudia's interpretation of the law, there was no way Jonathan could aspire for a third swearing in by 2015. He therefore emphasized that Jonathan would only contest for one term and no more.

With Ogbemudia done, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu¹¹ said he would speak on behalf of the old Eastern Nigeria where Jonathan hailed from. He said that given the alliances that had been forged with the North over decades, it was only proper that Jonathan be allowed to contest the 2011 presidential election on the platform of the PDP.

Notwithstanding these pleas, and apparently provoked by Isokrari's opening salvo, Alhaji Adamu Ciroma¹² argued that since the PDP zoning/rotation arrangement was anchored on the principle of equity and fairness, there was no way Jonathan could contest the presidential election in 2011 on the platform of the party.

Ciroma's position was understandable. The logic of presidential elections in Nigeria has always been centred on geo-politics, which Chief Olabode George¹³ once described simplistically as 'turn-by-turn', in which a power

block always replaces another, though not necessarily to the benefit of their people.

With the ammunition of ethnicity and religion as manipulative tools in the hands of those who control the levers of power in Nigeria, most often to suit specific interests, the political aspiration of Jonathan, after a southern Christian President had ruled for eight uninterrupted years, was always going to be a problem¹⁴. This then accounted for the proxy wars that nearly disrupted the social fabric of the nation in the last days of Yar'Adua. Also the reason why there was a serious contention at the meeting.

The notion of North and South in Nigeria's political equation was never really tested until then. The problem was further compounded by the fact that Jonathan did not fit into the tripartite nature of that strategic calculation. Being neither Yoruba nor Igbo nor Hausa/Fulani, the emergence of a minority president was in itself against the standard run of play. These factors and factions explain the difficult negotiations that preceded the National Assembly resolution on the 'Doctrine of Necessity', by which Vice President Jonathan became Acting President in February 2010¹⁵.

In the build-up to the PDP presidential primaries, these primordial issues were difficult to resolve, with emotions still running high.

While the pursuit of equity in the distribution of opportunities in a plural society is good for national cohesion and development, regionalism has always been the tactic of choice for Nigerian politicians who profit from promoting ancient differences. In that room on that day, there were many who believed that, because of where he hailed from, Jonathan had no right to seek the PDP presidential ticket.

Eventually, speakers yielded the floor to the then Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Alhaji Mahmud Yayale Ahmed, a strong ally of Jonathan and a respected voice in the North. Yayale prefaced his contribution

with the position of the Constitution which, he argued, conferred on Jonathan or anybody for that matter the right to seek any office of their choice, including the presidency. But he also added that the issue was that of morality, in which case Jonathan, of his own volition, could choose not to run based on the zoning principle of his party which was clearly not in his favour.

However, Yayale made it clear that all factors considered, it was more in the nation's interest to allow an incumbent from Niger Delta to complete the tenure of the ticket under which he came to power than to preclude him from running. Yayale argued that while he understood the position of the PDP leaders from the North, building a nation required sacrifices on the part of critical stakeholders. He therefore made a very compelling argument as to why Jonathan should be allowed to run on grounds of national unity.

What Yayale may not have said at the meeting, but which he once shared with me, was a conversation he had with President Obasanjo in the weeks preceding the 2007 general elections. This was during Yayale's time as Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. By Yayale's account, Obasanjo had, in the course of a discussion on the power equation in Nigeria, stated that in case he was not alive when the turn of the North ended and power came to the South; his hope was that someone from the South-South would become president. That, in Obasanjo's view, would settle the question of the minority in Nigeria.

While he may or may not have had Jonathan in mind at the time of the conversation related by Yayale, Obasanjo's calculation was always that after Yar'Adua, it would be the turn of the South-South to produce the president of Nigeria. It was hardly surprising therefore that after Yar'Adua's death, Obasanjo became the arrowhead of the campaign to have Jonathan elected president in 2011. He also made it clear at every point that it would only be for one term. Although Yayale did not invoke Obasanjo's name at the meeting, there were signs that he had also joined forces with the former president in an

apparent bid to ensure Jonathan was elected.

At the end of the meeting, the consensus was that the party should adopt the position articulated by Nwodo on why it was necessary to allow Jonathan contest for one term by completing the ticket on which he came to power with the late Yar'Adua.

But what exactly was Nwodo's position?

He had launched into his opening remarks by reminding those present of how the PDP started, and the reasoning behind the adoption of the zoning policy at a session held in the house of Prof. Jerry Gana¹⁶ in Abuja. Nwodo observed that attendees at that 1998 meeting reflected the national mood on power relations in Nigeria as well as the angst over a perceived dominance by one section of the country. They resolved that ceding the presidency to the South was crucial to winning the election. Nwodo continued, "I recall that after we had decided that our presidential candidate would come from the South, Alhaji Lawal Kaita said most memorably that it was most fitting because it would compensate Dr Alex Ekwueme¹⁷ for all his efforts, and Ekwueme replied that the zoning was not to his person but to the South, in which case anybody from the region could aspire for the party's ticket.

"At the end, it was General Olusegun Obasanjo, not Ekwueme, who secured the party's presidential ticket, but we enforced zoning very scrupulously because when the late Alhaji Abubakar Rimi collected nomination form, not only did I return his cheque to him, we ensured he did not participate at the primaries in Jos." Nwodo pointed out that it was at the 1998 meeting that he was appointed the party's founding National Secretary and the late Chief Solomon Lar the National Chairman, after Ekwueme was elevated to the position of Board of Trustees (BoT) Chairman and Gana, the BoT National Secretary.

"By the time Obasanjo was seeking a second-term in 2003, the main

problem was that majority of the governors were on the side of his deputy, Vice President Atiku Abubakar. While we also brought out the issue of zoning, there was a serious contention that it could not be applied to edge out any aspirant. That was how northern aspirants like Chief Barnabas Gemade were allowed to contest the presidential primaries.” Nwodo touched on how the party succeeded in prevailing on Atiku against running on his own or supporting Ekwueme, in return for continuation as Obasanjo’s running mate¹⁸.

Towards the end of Obasanjo’s second-term late in 2006, no fewer than 34 persons had collected nomination forms to seek the PDP presidential ticket. Nwodo offered a breakdown of the state of play, “Of the 34 aspirants, 18 were from the North and 16 from the South. But interestingly, the three leading aspirants at the period were actually governors from the South. They were Dr Peter Odili, Mr Donald Duke and Dr Sam Egwu¹⁹.” Nwodo did not fail to note a curious fact, “From the North, the late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua was not even among those who collected form.”

It was only after the collapse of Obasanjo’s purported ‘third-term agenda’ that Yar’Adua collected the presidential nomination form. “Now, what the foregoing means is that the only document we can rely on in this matter is the Nigerian Constitution and that was what brought Jonathan to power, in which case, he continued where Yar’Adua with whom he contested the 2011 presidential election, stopped,” declared Nwodo, who insisted that, in 2007 nobody was precluded from seeking the party’s ticket on the basis of region.

Having sketched out the road to that juncture, Nwodo suggested that the most practical way out for the PDP was to allow a completion of that Yar’Adua/Jonathan ticket. That would only happen with Jonathan seeking another term in 2011. “The only thing that can obviate that is if Jonathan says he is not running. But he has legal backing, even within the context of our party’s convention, to seek another term that will allow him to complete the Yar’Adua/Jonathan ticket,” Nwodo concluded.

So impressed was Jonathan by the presentation that he called Nwodo that night to ask if he had read from a prepared speech. “When I told him that I just spoke from the heart, President Jonathan pleaded with me to have it written down so I could present it to the PDP National Executive Committee meeting the next day for adoption and that was what happened”, Nwodo would later say of the persuasive argument that won the day.

However, Ciroma and his group would not be pacified. Joined by Dr Iyorchia Ayu, Alhaji Lawal Kaita, Alhaji Bello Kurfi, Ambassador Yahaya Kwande and Alhaji Bashir Ibrahim Yusuf²⁰, Ciroma followed up the next day with a letter to Nwodo and PDP National Working Committee (NWC) members. Arguing that the ticket should be exclusively reserved for northerners, Ciroma insisted that the party should not field Jonathan as its candidate for the 2011 presidential election.

Titled, “Request for declaration to reserve the PDP presidential nomination for northern aspirants and to restrain President Goodluck Jonathan from participating in the 2010 presidential primaries as an aspirant,” the letter quoted Article 7, section 7.2(c) of the PDP Constitution which prescribed that, “In pursuant of the principles of equity, justice and fairness, the Party shall adhere to the policy of rotation and zoning of Party and public elective offices and it shall be enforced by the appropriate executive committee at all levels.”

Taking its cue from Nwodo’s speech, the letter traced the history of the PDP and the emergence of presidential candidates at every point based on the principle of zoning. The letter then declared, “If we follow our Party’s practice and constitution, which we must, the party must nominate a northerner as our presidential candidate and a southerner as our vice presidential candidate.” To do otherwise would amount to injustice and a violation of the PDP constitution, the Ciroma Group wrote. “To us, Yar’Adua was nominated to fulfil the rotation of power to the North. The fact that he died midway did not in any way terminate the total number of uninterrupted years which the North is entitled to

enjoy. Nor did it obfuscate the right of the North to field a replacement candidate.”

In all the arguments and counter-arguments at the meeting, not one person raised the issue of Jonathan’s capacity to do the job. No one outlined his stance on any national issue. Nor were the same issues of competence and character raised in respect of the northern aspirants within the PDP and other parties at the time. The central issue was which zone would produce the next president. With a general acceptance of a rotation of power based on geography, the odds were stacked against Jonathan.

In the midst of these agitations, Jonathan had not publicly announced his decision one way or another; it was the people around him that made it clear he was going to run. There were also speculations that he could seek to be running mate to some prominent northerner. Indeed, when WikiLeaks began publishing dispatches from the United States embassies across the world, there were revealing insights into the way Jonathan’s mind was working at the time.

The then American ambassador to Nigeria, Dr Robin Renée Sanders had unfettered access to The Villa and could see Jonathan anytime she wanted. That was perhaps because Jonathan relied heavily on the United States to help navigate what had become a rather tricky political situation. One of Sanders’ dispatches read, “Jonathan said he does not anticipate standing for elections in 2011 and that he is not working towards being a presidential candidate. He wants to put into place an electoral structure that will be ready for national elections. He did, however, note that, ‘if they want me to run, that will be something to consider at that time.’”

That Jonathan was initially unsure about whether or not to run was not due to lack of interest. It was because he felt the North would strongly oppose his candidature, given his experience during the uncertainty surrounding President Yar’Adua’s health. Among the most aggrieved northern power brokers were the likes of former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida (retd), who

in 1999 collaborated with the military authorities to ensure that only two southerners – two Yoruba men – contested the presidential election²¹.

However, while Jonathan still mulled over his options, some South-South leaders who saw in him the best opportunity for the region to produce their first president of Nigeria, prevailed on him to run. The most powerful lobby for Jonathan to run at the time was his Chief of Staff, Chief Mike Oghiadomhe, a personal friend of his who happened to be more politically savvy. Obasanjo of course wanted Jonathan, but for a single term. There were also people like the late Prof. Dora Akunyili, then Minister of Information, who believed Jonathan would be making a serious miscalculation if he succumbed to the idea of being a running mate to a northern candidate.

When Jonathan eventually decided to seek the PDP ticket, Babangida, rather uncharacteristically, openly challenged the ambition. Since in the PDP constitution was enshrined a “policy of rotation and zoning”, Babangida argued in a letter to Nwodo, Jonathan’s candidacy was a clear breach of such arrangement. “If the party has become so helpless in the face of these gross violations of its own constitution, then many of us shall have no alternative but to reconsider our continued membership of the party,” Babangida threatened.

The crisis roiled on. The now aspirant Jonathan decided to confront the issue of zoning, but not in a manner that helped his cause. On 27th September, 2010, Jonathan declared that the concept of zoning and rotation of political offices as enshrined in the PDP constitution was limited to offices that were within the absolute control of the party.

Accompanied by a retinue of party bigwigs and about nine governors who were also seeking second-terms in office, Jonathan spoke at the PDP national secretariat after submitting his presidential nomination form. “Either by virtue of the PDP Constitution, or in practice, the presidency of Nigeria has never been zoned to any part of the country. There is the concept of zoning and rotation in the PDP constitution to encourage power to move from one part to

the other and it is not limited to the Office of the President,” he declared.

Having been received by Nwodo, along with other members of the National Working Committee (NWC), it was evident that Jonathan had the PDP leadership on his side. He had also carefully selected the Governors that accompanied him. All six geo-political zones were represented: Liyel Imoke (Cross River – South-South); Ibrahim Shema (Katsina – North-West); Aliyu Akwe Doma (Nasarawa – North Central); Danbaba Suntai (Taraba – North-East); Isa Yuguda (Bauchi – North-East); Alao Akala (Oyo – South-West); Sullivan Chime (Enugu – South-East), Segun Oni (Ekiti – South-West) and Ikedi Ohakim (Imo – South-East).

The momentum had begun to shift in favour of Jonathan. Leaders of the South-South, his geopolitical zone, were the first to publicly endorse him for the 2011 presidential race, while the meeting of the governors of the 19 northern states under the aegis of the Northern Governors Forum (NGF) also went in his favour even though he was not endorsed. Amidst a hot exchange between Benue State Governor, Mr Gabriel Suswam and his Niger State counterpart, Dr Babangida Aliyu, the governors in the end failed to take any definite stand on the contentious issue of zoning of the presidency.

At the meeting held at Government House, Kaduna, the governors actually voted on the issue. The governors of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Kwara, Kano, Borno, Katsina, Gombe, Niger and Jigawa reportedly voted that zoning must be maintained and that the agreement that the North should produce the president in 2011 was still valid. The governors of Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, Kaduna, Kogi and Nasarawa States contended that the contest should be open to all Nigerians including President Jonathan. The Bauchi State Governor, Mallam Isa Yuguda, at the time a staunch supporter of Jonathan, could not attend the meeting because of the death of the Emir of Bauchi earlier that day.

However, despite the disagreement, the thinking among most of the

governors, including those who voted in favour of zoning, was that it was more pragmatic to allow Jonathan to continue for another term of four years. Therefore, in the communiqué at the end of the meeting, the northern governors said zoning was purely the affair of the PDP and that wider consultations should still continue at all levels of the party. The meeting avowed that, based on the provisions of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Jonathan and any other citizens had the right to contest for the office of the President. The communiqué was read by the Niger State Governor and Chairman of the NGF, Dr Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu.

A wave of discontent continued to sweep through the ranks of top northern PDP leaders, but it was evident they were in a losing battle. Jonathan had support from some northern governors who also had their eyes on the future, perhaps because all the campaigns were hinged on him spending only one term. Jonathan's stock continued to rise, especially in four zones of the country: South-West, South-East, North-Central and his home base of South-South.

On 1st October 2010, a bomb exploded less than a kilometre away from Eagle Square, where Jonathan was inspecting a military parade in commemoration of the nation's 50th independence anniversary. The nation was jolted by the attack. The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) claimed responsibility for the attack. In a knee-jerk reaction, Jonathan quickly absolved the group of any culpability. "What happened yesterday was a terrorist act and MEND was just used as a straw; MEND is not a terrorist group. It is erroneous to think that my people who have been agitating for good living will deliberately blow up the opportunity they have now," Jonathan said in his address at a colloquium in Abuja.

While this presidential defence of MEND did not go down well with many northern politicians, the situation became more toxic when MEND leader, Henry Okah told *Al Jazeera* International News Network that a presidential aide wanted him to implicate the North. His words, "A day after the attack, a

very close associate of President Jonathan called me and explained to me that there had been a bombing in Nigeria and that President Jonathan wanted me to reach out to the group, MEND, and get them to retract the earlier statement they had issued claiming the attacks. They wanted to blame the attack on northerners who are trying to fight against him to come back as president and if this was done, I was not going to have any problems with the South African government. I declined to do this and a few hours later, I was arrested. It was based on their belief that I was going to do that that Jonathan issued a statement saying that MEND did not carry out the attack.”

This development heightened the mutual suspicion between Jonathan and prominent northern politicians within the PDP. So unsure was he about what could happen at the December 2010 national convention of the party that he proposed an amendment to the Electoral Act that would allow political appointees and elected officials to vote as delegates. The idea was to pave the way for 42 ministers and hundreds of ambassadors and chairmen of Federal Government agencies (then numbering about 429) to attend the PDP national convention as voting delegates. The calculation of his handlers was that even if there was a strong northern resistance to his aspiration, those government delegates, keen to protect their jobs and privileges, would vote Jonathan at the primaries.

The President’s handlers were banking on an amendment window created by the request for extension of time made by INEC to the National Assembly to remove section 87(8) in the Electoral Act 2010²². And so it was that Jonathan sought to insert this provision, “A political party that adopts the system of indirect primaries for the choice of its candidates shall outline in its constitution or guidelines: (i) who shall be a delegate at the congress or convention, (ii) in the case of democratically elected delegates, the procedure for the election of such delegates.”

As it happened, the President was in fact seeking to remove a clause that

had actually been inserted by the PDP-dominated National Assembly at the request of Nwodo, who wanted to clip the wings of the state governors believed to be largely anti-Jonathan. But soon after the amendment was passed, it dawned on the President's supporters that it was a strategic miscalculation.

To further raise the stakes against Jonathan in the build-up to the PDP primaries, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar was selected as the consensus presidential candidate of the North. He was chosen by a conclave of northern leaders among other aspirants like General Ibrahim Babangida, General Aliyu Gusau and Governor Bukola Saraki. The choice of Atiku was the culmination of a two-month search by the Consensus Committee of the Northern Political Leaders Forum (NPLF) led by Ciroma.

Babangida, who spoke via a statement by his Campaign Director-General, Dr Raymond Dokpesi, in applauding the choice of Atiku, took a shot at Jonathan, "You cannot breach the rules and regulations of the party and yet pretend to foster the rules and regulations of Nigeria. Human conduct is a logical system and not merely of opportunism, more so under a regime of democracy and constitutional government."

Nonetheless, Jonathan was still the man to beat. He had going for him the majority of the 21 PDP governors on his side. Therefore, when they all converged at the party's secretariat on 16th December 2010 for a National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting, it was almost certain that Jonathan was going to be formally endorsed. But the session was delayed for several hours due to a closed-door meeting, moderated by party leaders, between Jonathan and governors in the Office of the National Chairman, Nwodo. Apart from the order of the primaries (the governors advocated for the gubernatorial ahead of the presidential), there was also the yet-to-be resolved zoning issue.

Shortly after the meeting began, a paper was circulated containing the names of the PDP governors to enable them endorse Jonathan's candidature for the party's ticket without any precondition. "What do we take to the North for this

deal with the President against the background that we are working against the party's zoning formula?" Governor Babangida Aliyu of Niger State asked of Jonathan and the party leadership. "What exactly do we tell our people for jettisoning zoning, especially with Atiku now picked as consensus candidate for the North by some of our respected elders?"

First to respond was Chief Tony Anenih who said it was already taken for granted that Jonathan would spend only one term and that the governors would only be dragging the party back by making zoning an issue at that point. Dr Ahmadu Ali echoed the sentiment, adding that it was important for the governors to come out clearly to endorse Jonathan. "But we want to hear it from the President himself that he has agreed to spend only one term," was Aliyu's riposte.

As the former Niger Governor told me, it was at that point, with other governors joining in the clamour, that Jonathan agreed he would spend only one term. "With that, we all mandated the then Katsina State Governor, Alhaji Ibrahim Shema to brief the media on the agreement reached, after the EXCO meeting that had been delayed till then," Aliyu confirmed.

Immediately the meeting ended, Shema was ushered before journalists to read a prepared text. Titled, "Resolution of PDP Governors", the statement affirmed that democratic systems all over the world "recognize the principle of incumbency and continuity", while entrenched democratic culture "persistent in presidential system and our constitution entitles our President to run for a second-term, which the PDP Governors support. The Governors also recognize the Yar'Adua/Jonathan ticket and therefore hereby support and endorse President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GCFR) to contest the 2011 election as the PDP presidential candidate for a period of four years only."

Speaking after the meeting, Nwodo maintained that PDP had not jettisoned the zoning principle, and that Jonathan was only trying to complete the joint ticket he had with the late Yar'Adua. What that implied, however, was that the

tenure would terminate by 2015. “In the zoning arrangement, we didn’t envisage that a serving president would die in office, unfortunately we lost our dear President,” Nwodo began. “Today, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, by the dictate of our constitution, is exercising the term of a joint mandate given by the people of our great country. If our late President were alive today, we wouldn’t be contesting his right to run for a second-term under our national constitution. It was his entitlement. But Dr Jonathan, who is part and parcel of that mandate, has a right to contest the remaining of that joint ticket in 2011.”

Former Plateau State Governor and founding Chairman of the party, Chief Solomon Lar, echoed that viewpoint. He asserted that, “The party has been able to resolve the matter in the interest of the country. I am happy that the party has said President Jonathan can continue with the joint ticket he enjoyed with the late President Yar‘Adua. That’s the position of the party.”

With that endorsement, it became clear that Atiku’s aspiration was dead on arrival but he would not give up without a fight. At the PDP Convention, he launched a blistering attack on Jonathan who he described as “someone who simply thinks that being president is an end in itself” while also decrying attempts to jettison the zoning policy of the party. “If rules can be thrown away by just anyone who feels that he is powerful enough to do so, then it is an invitation to lawlessness and anarchy.”

Atiku charged that the founders of the PDP had “devised rules for the rotation of power between North and South in response to cries of marginalization and domination. We wanted peace and justice to reign. And we put it in our Constitution (Section 7.2.c), and we all know what a constitution means. That provision has not been altered. In 2002, an expanded caucus of our great party met and reaffirmed that policy.” He brandished a copy of the minutes of that meeting. “My main opponent was at that meeting and voted in favour of that resolution.”

Atiku was adamant that delegates would be making a mistake to “entrust the

fate of 150 million Nigerians in the hands of someone who has demonstrated that he cannot get any problem right – the economy, our unity, terrorism, even the Niger Delta. You cannot entrust the security of the Niger Delta and indeed the entire Gulf of Guinea, so vital to our economy and the world economy, to a man who has demonstrated utter lack of capacity to focus on even the simplest of our problems. You cannot entrust the fate of millions of Nigerians in the hands of someone who fumbles at every opportunity.” Atiku could not resist a snarky dismissal of the man named Goodluck, “Obviously you can become a president by accident or good fortune. But you do not govern a country by accident or luck.”

The former Vice President submitted that governing a country needed a plan and its courageous execution. “It requires the capacity and willingness to assemble the best and brightest people to help you get things done,” qualities he suggested were lacking in Jonathan. “The last eight months have clearly demonstrated that he does not have what it takes to lead this country. It is time for us to move beyond this luck thing. It is time for serious people to take over the affairs of this country.”

Nevertheless, Jonathan won the primaries, defeating Atiku. But Jonathan also knew that many members of the party from the North were still not comfortable with his emergence as the candidate. And in all the negotiations with critical stakeholders from the region, his handlers’ position was anchored on the understanding that he would only do one term and not contest again in 2015. This allowed many governors who were then running for their second-term in office to also make ambitious calculations as potential PDP presidential contenders for 2015 elections.

On 1st February 2011, Jonathan further cemented this position by publicly announcing that he had no ambition to stay in office beyond 2015, if elected. Interacting with Nigerian diplomats working in the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the African Union (AU) in Addis-

Ababa, Ethiopia, Jonathan remarked that, “Four years is enough for anyone in power to make significant improvement and if I can’t improve on power within this period, it then means I cannot do anything even if I am there for the next four years.”

Fielding questions during an interactive session with the Nigerian community in Ethiopia on the same trip, he added for emphasis, “I would have loved that the Nigerians in Diaspora vote this year but to be frank with you, that is going to be difficult now. Presently, the law does not allow for voting outside Nigeria and so this year Nigerians in Diaspora will not vote, but I will work towards it by 2015 even though I will not be running for election.”

While he subsequently gave a different interpretation to what he said, there was no denying the fact that the Addis Ababa statements helped solidify the president’s support base in the North at the PDP primaries and the election proper in April 2011.

In an explosive open letter to Jonathan, Obasanjo testified that his one-time protégé had indeed promised to spend only one term in office. In the December 2013 letter titled, ‘Before It Is Too Late’, Obasanjo disclosed that he knew of the much talked about deal between Jonathan and the PDP governors, “I had gone to Benue State for the marriage of one of my staff, Vitalis Ortese. Governor Suswam was my hospitable host. He told me that you had accepted a one-term presidency to allow for ease of getting support across the board in the North. I decided to cross-check with you. You did not hesitate to confirm to me that you are a strong believer in a one-term of six years for the President and that by the time you have used the unexpired time of your predecessor and the four years of your first term, you would have almost used up to six years and you would not need any more term or time.”

When I sought confirmation from Suswam whether Obasanjo was correct that Jonathan indeed pledged to spend only a term, he was initially evasive. Asked pointedly whether Obasanjo lied, Suswam gave this response, “No,

Baba didn't lie, but I wonder why he had to mention my name and not that of Liyel Imoke (then governor of Cross River State) with whom he (Obasanjo) had a similar conversation and the whole context of it."

In the end, Jonathan won the presidential election by defeating three northern candidates: Muhammadu Buhari of CPC, Nuhu Ribadu of ACN and Ibrahim Shekarau of ANPP. His main opponent was Buhari, whose supporters were involved in the violence that followed the announcement of the result. Incidentally, a disaggregation of the results revealed that Jonathan secured more than 50 percent of his entire votes from the South-South and South-East alone. And perhaps more significantly, he lost all the North-East and North-West states, leaving the country sharply divided when you examine the electoral map – a red flag his handlers probably paid no serious attention to.

However, because of the unwritten consensus that Jonathan would only spend one term, many PDP leaders felt it was not altogether a bad deal. It also suited many prominent politicians from the North who were making strategic calculations about the future. On 6th May, 2011, three weeks before the inauguration of Jonathan for his four-year term, Babangida declared that the North must be allowed to produce the president in 2015 in the interest of justice and in line with the zoning policy of the PDP. It was a direct message to Jonathan that there would be no second-term, a sentiment shared by many people within the PDP at the time.

On fears expressed by some parties that the zoning agreement could be breached in 2015 as Jonathan did in 2011, Babangida offered reassurance, "You will have to wait until the time comes and see what will happen. A northerner has every right to come out in 2015 and say he is the one to be voted for and he would hinge his decision on the provisions of the party."

So, even before Jonathan assumed office on 29th May, 2011, a line was already drawn by prominent politicians in the North that he was entitled to only one term, and that if in 2015 he made any attempt to seek another term, he

would be checkmated.

- [8](#) Politician, businessman and member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Board of Trustees from Rivers State.
- [9](#) The oil-producing area of the country comprising six states: Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom.
- [10](#) Ogbemudia was former Military Governor of the old Bendel State (now Edo and Delta).
- [11](#) Businessman, politician, member of the PDP Board of Trustees from Imo State and a strong voice in the South-east.
- [12](#) A respected member of the northern establishment whose professional career spanned banking (he was a former CBN Governor) and media (a former editor of New Nigerian Newspaper), Ciroma was a minister in the Second and Fourth Republic as well as under the military.
- [13](#) Former PDP National Vice Chairman, George, once argued that “the concept of PDP is Turn By Turn Nigeria Limited and when it was our turn, Chief Obasanjo did some things and failed to remember his own people back home in terms of infrastructural facilities, human and material resources management.”
- [14](#) Obasanjo, a military Head of State between 1977 and 1979, was President from 1999 to 2007.
- [15](#) On 9th February 2011, the National Assembly voted to declare the Vice-President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan the Acting President, following the constitutional crisis engendered by the inability to transmit a letter to that effect by ailing President Yar'Adua who was in Saudi Arabia. The motion drafted by the senate and passed by both houses stated that Jonathan “shall henceforth discharge the functions of the Office of the President, commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the federation.”
- [16](#) Founding Chairman of the defunct MAMSER, Gana was a former Minister under the late General Sani Abacha. He was also a Minister in different portfolio before becoming a Special Adviser under President Obasanjo.
- [17](#) Second Republic Vice President who was a prominent member of the group of politicians termed G-43 that canvassed for the military to quit politics

before the death of General Sani Abacha. Most of them were founding members of the PDP in 1998 with Ekwueme as leader.

[18](#) As VP to Obasanjo, Atiku told the BBC Hausa Service, in a broadcast on the eve of the primaries, that he had three options: To fight it out with Obasanjo, to back him or to go with Ekwueme who was also a contender. Atiku eventually backed down and submitted to being Obasanjo's running mate a second time.

[19](#) Odili was a second-term governor of Rivers State; Duke, Cross River State, and Ekwu, Ebonyi State.

[20](#) Ayu was a former Senate President who also went on to serve as Minister, Kaita a former civilian governor of Kaduna State, Kurfi a retired bureaucrat, Kwande was a former diplomat and Yusuf is currently Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Movement.

[21](#) In 1999, the then military government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar had, by a sleight of hand, ensured that the tickets of the two dominant political parties, PDP and the All Peoples Party (APP) were secured by Yoruba men. While Obasanjo picked that of PDP, the APP was given to Chief Olu Falae who was fielded by the Yoruba-based Alliance for Democracy (AD). The APP candidate, Dr Ogbonaya Onu, was persuaded to withdraw for Falae.

[22](#) The provision prohibited ministers, advisers, special assistants, commissioners and all other political appointees from voting as delegates at party conventions.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SEEDS OF REBELLION

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, was at the wheel, driving himself to a friend's house on an April night in 2012 when his mobile phone rang. The woman at the other end of the line from the caller ID was very well known to him so he had no hesitation picking the call. But the greetings were not warm, an indication that all was not well. Before Tambuwal could ask what was amiss, the caller had handed her mobile handset to another female.

On the line this time was an unmistakable voice. "You this Hausa boy," Dame Patience Jonathan began, "you want to bring down the government of my husband; you want to disgrace him out of power? *Una no fit! God no go allow you.*" For about five minutes, Mrs Jonathan railed against Tambuwal, who was accused of harbouring a sinister agenda against the Federal Government and the President.

Asked whether he said anything in reply while the vituperation lasted, Tambuwal said, "What do you want me to say to the wife of the President? I just kept quiet and allowed her to vent her anger on me. After a while she paused and I asked, 'Are you done, Ma? Thank you very much' – and I dropped the call."

Although Dame Patience Jonathan was calling in respect of a resolution by the House of Representatives to probe the fuel subsidy scam, her resentment against Tambuwal was more personal and far deeper. The story started in the weeks preceding the 2011 presidential election when there was a deal between Jonathan and the leadership of the National Assembly that the presiding officers would also come back to their respective positions.

The agreement was that if they won their elections (and they were all sure they would), David Mark would retain his position as Senate President while Ike Ekweremadu would remain Deputy Senate President. In the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole would retain the position of Speaker while that of Deputy Speaker would go to another person, also from North-East, to replace Bayero Nafada who was not returning, having chosen instead to contest for the governorship primaries of his state, which he lost. The strategic calculation was that once they were nominated as the party's candidates for the offices, there would be no problem on the floor of the National Assembly.

With that agreement in place, Jonathan had to secure the endorsement of the PDP National Working Committee and the Board of Trustees to retain the zoning arrangement in the National Assembly leadership, which had been in place since 2007 under the late Yar'Adua. Even though there were a few dissenting voices like Governor Sule Lamido of Jigawa who felt that the zoning formula had to change since the presidency had shifted to the South, the majority favoured the idea of retaining the status quo. With that, the position of Senate President was ceded to remain in the North-Central; House Speaker, South-West; Deputy Senate President, South-East and Deputy Speaker, North-East. That was how the PDP zoning arrangement was formalized based on the existing format.

However, Bankole lost his bid to return to the House in an election in which the Tinubu-led Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) virtually swept the entire South-West. In fact, only six PDP members were elected from the six states in the zone at the 2011 general elections. The implication was that if the zoning arrangement was retained, the Speaker would emerge from those six PDP members. This did not go down well with many PDP members across the country and that marked the beginning of the agitation that the zoning formula had to be changed, given the result of the election.

Leading the campaign was a former Senate Chief Whip and prominent PDP

member, Chief Rowland Owie, who criticised moves to cede the position of the Speaker to the South-West when only six PDP members were elected from the zone. He argued that the position should instead go to the South-East where the PDP won “convincingly” during the general elections. Meanwhile, elected members from across the country were also meeting, and most of them resolved that they would not pick any of the six PDP members from the South-West as their speaker. The rallying point was Aminu Tambuwal and Emeka Ihedioha who worked closely together in the Sixth National Assembly²³.

However, based on the prevailing zoning arrangement, there was jostling among the six PDP members from the South-West, as two returning members from Oyo State were slugging it out. Although Hon. Muraina Ajibola was the preferred choice of the zone’s PDP caucus, it was Mrs Mulikat Akande-Adeola that the presidency eventually endorsed for the office in Abuja. The choice was believed to have been made by Dame Patience Jonathan who, after being approached by some women groups, took it upon herself to produce a female Speaker for the House of Representatives.

Having endorsed Akande-Adeola who was announced officially as the PDP candidate for the office of Speaker, Jonathan saw the aspiration of Tambuwal and Ihedioha as an affront and did all he could to dissuade them from running; firstly, by using their Governors to remonstrate with them. When this move failed, the security agencies were deployed to apprehend the duo who got wind of the plot and went underground. But following the arrest of Bankole by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) on the eve of National Assembly resumption, Tambuwal and Ihedioha filed a suit against the EFCC and the Inspector General of Police before the Federal High Court sitting in Abuja, seeking protection from being intimidated or arrested.

In their affidavit in support of the motion, the duo said there were moves by these agencies to arrest them for the purpose of preventing them from being present to accept nomination for the position of Speaker and Deputy Speaker

respectively. They specifically asked the court to take judicial notice of the fact that from the moment they declared to vie for the offices, the two Federal Government agencies had been harassing and intimidating them with a view to forcing them to withdraw from the contest.

According to Tambuwal, the real intent of EFCC in arresting Bankole was to coax him into implicating Ihedioha and himself so that they would not be able to contest for the positions, and that they had been subjected to intense pressure from different quarters to drop their ambitions.

Such was the desperation that, when all efforts to make Tambuwal and Ihedioha back down failed, the ballot papers for the election were designed in such a way that each legislator was required to write his or her name on it, with clear threats that whoever went against the party line would be disciplined. The PDP had 202 members in the House as against a total of 158 elected on the platforms of all the other political parties combined, so the calculation was that the anointed Akande-Adeola would win.

With a clear majority, and having made it known that dissent would not be tolerated, the PDP leadership and the presidency were sure their candidates would sail through. Reality proved otherwise. While it was a smooth ride for David Mark and Ike Ekweremadu in the Senate (returned unopposed as President and Deputy President respectively), in the House of Representatives, Tambuwal polled 252 to defeat the official PDP candidate, Akande-Adeola who could only garner 90 votes.

Witnessing the drama were the then PDP Acting National Chairman, Dr Haliru Bello and two of the party's governors, Timipre Sylva (Bayelsa) and Ibrahim Idris (Kogi State). Bello watched as the votes were counted by the Clerk, Mr Sani Omolori; the moment Tambuwal's tally reached the threshold of 181 (the simple majority needed among 360 members), the Acting Chairman walked out in anger. Sylva, who sat close to Akande-Adeola and Idris, also left the chamber immediately it became clear that Tambuwal had been elected

Speaker.

Meanwhile, Osun State Governor, Rauf Aregbesola of the opposition ACN, who also witnessed the voting, started celebrating the moment it became clear that Tambuwal, a PDP dark horse, had won the poll. Aregbesola's Imo State counterpart, Chief Rochas Okorocha, did not share the enthusiasm, because Ihedioha who he saw as a political rival in his state, won the race for Deputy Speaker.

Other subplots came to light. Yakubu Dogara²⁴ from Bauchi State, initially pencilled down for the position of Deputy Speaker, was replaced with Isiaka Bawa (Taraba State) by the PDP a few hours to the poll. But the moment Tambuwal won, and with such a huge margin, the mood in the House changed such that when nominations were called for the position of Deputy Speaker and Ihedioha's name came up, the chamber erupted with shouts of "unopposed". Friday Tulah, a member from Edo State, who had been delegated to nominate Bawa for the office of Deputy Speaker, stood up to give voice to the inexorable: Ihedioha's nomination would be unopposed "in the interest of harmony."

The election of Tambuwal and Ihedioha rattled the presidency and the First Lady felt particularly slighted that she could not produce a female Speaker. As her husband publicly congratulated the duo, the PDP National Working Committee (NWC) held an emergency meeting, after which it lamented what transpired in the House.

Rather than find a way for accommodation, especially since Tambuwal won by a huge majority of 74 percent, those around Jonathan thought a hard-line posture was the way to go. Tambuwal and Ihedioha were seen as political enemies and in the war of attrition that ensued, the presidency unwittingly sowed seeds of opposition in the National Assembly. Since the PDP was pushing Tambuwal away, the opposition began to embrace him.

By some accounts, Tambuwal wanted to work with the President and went as far as to approach the Senate President to be his guarantor in the early days, a role Mark was happy to play. “I took him and Emeka (Ihedioha) to the President for a meeting where they gave assurances that they would cooperate and work with the government. But there was always a concern from the Jonathan camp that Tambuwal was an ambitious politician,” Mark would later say.

In Mark’s view, the problem arose because the First Lady kept alleging that Tambuwal had presidential aspirations and for that reason, could not be relied upon to support her husband. The former Senate President shared his own insight on the First Lady’s suspicion, “I guess she had the same fear about me even when she never said it to my face. She once accosted Senator Joy Emordi to say, ‘Joy, I hear you are the manager of David Mark Presidential Campaign Organization’, which was a baseless accusation. I had to meet the President to clarify issues with him. So, I would say it was President Jonathan and his wife who radicalized Tambuwal and turned him into a political foe.”

Ihedioha believes Jonathan needlessly sowed the seeds of division and discord not only in the House of Representatives but in the PDP itself. “President Jonathan did not trust many people and he was suspicious of those who meant well for him. And perhaps for that reason, it was difficult to ascertain who was in charge during the election while team efforts were very weak. There was no coordinated campaign programme and he also unwittingly empowered his enemies,” Ihedioha opined.

Casting his mind back to the leadership tussle in the House which riled the presidency, he observed that the President was not well advised. Ihedioha volunteered that, “The people fighting Tambuwal and myself were PDP members who considered themselves to be foot soldiers of President Jonathan, even when Tambuwal and I discharged our duties patriotically. Besides, it was a wrong way to pay us back for the help we rendered him and the nation at a

most defining moment.”

The former deputy speaker revealed that, in February 2010, “Upon the intervention of the then Hon. Olaka Nwogu (now a senator), I approached Bayero Nafada and Tambuwal at a time I was Chief Whip, as well as Hon. Farouk Lawan, to go with me to a meeting with Mrs Patience Jonathan at the residence of Hon. Austin Opara, former House of Representatives Deputy Speaker. Based on Mrs Jonathan’s request, it was at that meeting we agreed, without any preconditions, to make her husband the Acting President.”

Following that meeting, “An expanded session of the House leadership with then Speaker, Hon. Dimeji Bankole, was held in my house. That was where the motion for the Doctrine of Necessity was drafted that night by Tambuwal before we ratified it the next morning at an executive session and subsequently passed it at the plenary.” Ihedioha alleged that, despite all their efforts on Jonathan’s behalf, the President and his supporters did everything to frustrate him and Tambuwal in the House. But they were not the only victims of a growing tendency to sideline those with whom the presidency disagreed.

Apparently unmindful of the fact that politics is a game of additions, Jonathan spent most of his time in office fighting many PDP members who eventually left the party for him, starting from his home state. The calculation was that the President needed “his own man” in Bayelsa and for that reason, Timipre Sylva had to go.

Whatever might have been their differences, it was not in any way helpful that Jonathan was fighting a battle in his state so early in his administration. At the end, it was the PDP National Working Committee (NWC) that did the hatchet job by “screening out” Sylva from contesting the party’s gubernatorial primaries.

Sylva had actually won the PDP gubernatorial primaries earlier in the year and had been declared²⁵ the party’s candidate. But the PDP made it clear that

the victory had been overtaken by the new events. “For the avoidance of doubt, and in line with the provisions of our guidelines for primary elections, no aspirant can or should use a provisional certificate as a basis for unilaterally declaring himself or herself as a candidate of PDP for the gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa State. Even where he or she does so, it is of no value, effect, or utility for the primary elections and is therefore redundant,” the party’s statement read.

Nominated in Silva’s stead for the party’s ticket was a member of the House of Representatives, Seriake Dickson, who went on to win the election. The moment Sylva left office, he was dragged before the EFCC for alleged corruption. On the eve of his court appearance on 8th May 2012, he published an open letter to Jonathan lamenting “the totally unjust way, manner, reason... people were used to remove me from office and the wave of state persecution. Most painful is that it is you, the President that is at the centre of it all.”

Highlighting the several ways he believed Jonathan had marked him out as an enemy to be crushed, the former Bayelsa State Governor said he could not risk public appearance anywhere in Nigeria “while you superintend over the affairs of the country as President. In other words, I cannot entrust my life in your hands as I am not sure of the limit you can go in your intentions against me.”

From then on, Sylva became a strong opponent of Jonathan. The fact that a former governor of his state would join the opposition so early in the life of his administration could not have been helpful to Jonathan’s cause. It would appear that it was a case of no lesson learnt, because a bigger front was opened in Rivers State, where Governor Rotimi Amaechi was also pushed into the camp of the opposition.

Jonathan, however, told me that Amaechi’s problem was not with him but rather with his wife and that at one point, he tried to reconcile them. But Amaechi has a different take on the issue, “I am happy President Jonathan told

you about my problem with his wife but he apparently did not tell you the whole story. The question you should ask yourself is, why should a Governor have problem with the wife of the President? The simple answer is that I could not surrender my mandate to a woman in Abuja, even if such a person was wife of the President. Also, I could not possibly grant questionable demands that would make me betray my oath of office. I won't say more than that for now since I am also writing my memoir, but that basically was my sin with Dame Patience Jonathan."

Amaechi traced the problem with Jonathan to a week after the latter assumed the presidency following the death of Yar'Adua in May 2010. Jonathan had promised to ensure the distribution of electricity generated through the various Independent Power Projects (IPPs) across the country. This was in response to Amaechi's request that the Federal Government should grant states the authority to distribute electricity generated at the completion of their IPPs. As the person who had been saddled with the responsibility of the power projects under Yar'Adua, it was a familiar terrain for Jonathan.

Speaking at the inauguration of the 100 megawatts Trans-Amadi Power Station, Phase II on 16th May 2010, Jonathan expressed concerns that Rivers and other states that had completed their power projects were unable to distribute them to the people. He promised to direct the then Minister of State for Power to work out modalities that would enhance the distribution of electricity generated by some state governments. "That is one of the reasons we want the Minister of Power to be here. Immediately we get to Abuja, we will tell him to set up the machinery that will ensure the distribution of power generated by some state governments," Jonathan pledged at the occasion.

Amaechi related that in a private session he had with Jonathan that day, the President not only reassured that the request by Rivers State would be granted, he asked the governor to write to Abuja on the issue and the letter was sent. By Amaechi's account, "At that period, I had no problem with Jonathan as I was

fully behind his aspiration to be president; the impression created was that he would treat my request after the 2011 election. But the moment he won the election, he wrote to turn down my request. That was bad faith.”

The relationship broke down irretrievably when the oil wells in Soku, Rivers State were taken and given to Bayelsa State. Amaechi recalled his private audience with Jonathan on the issue, “It was as if I was talking to the Governor of Bayelsa State rather than the President of Nigeria. He made it clear to me that protecting whatever he considered to be in the interest of Bayelsa was more important to him than doing the right thing for all the states in Nigeria, including Rivers where he spent most of his life. At that point, I knew there was no way we could work together.”

The rift became public with Amaechi’s role as Chairman of the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) and the deal breaker was the management of the Federation Account, which belongs to the three tiers of government. “If in one year, you took about N300 billion from the federation account to pay for subsidy and the next year, you are taking almost two trillion naira for the same thing when the fundamentals had not changed, then serious questions should be asked. And as NGF Chairman, it was my responsibility to ask those questions and Jonathan took it personal,” said an unbowed Amaechi.

In a big political party like the PDP where the majority of members have practically nothing in common beyond winning power, disagreements on principles and even mundane issues were always going to arise from time to time. Unfortunately, the predisposition of the Jonathan presidency was to treat anybody who had opposing views as political enemies, and this led to many stalwarts leaving the then ruling party. In overplaying their hand on many levels, Jonathan’s apparatchiks did not realise that they were strengthening the opposition. But it would appear they were taking their cues from the President himself.

The politics of exclusion was played throughout Jonathan’s tenure up until

the December 2014 PDP primaries, when he emerged as the ‘consensus’ candidate as all opposition had been pushed out. Even when some of his ministers lost the gubernatorial primaries in their states, no effort was made to placate or keep them in the fold. For instance, a week after then Information Minister, Labaran Maku, resigned from the PDP following his defeat at the party’s gubernatorial primaries, he was described as “an ungrateful animal”, despite the fact that he was still campaigning for Jonathan.

Maku left the PDP because he and the other loyalists were not given a level playing field. That was evident in the manner in which another minister, Samuel Ortom, was left no option but to resign from Jonathan’s government, after being denied the PDP ticket. He went on to win the gubernatorial election in Benue State on the platform of the APC.

Perhaps nothing signposted the level of intolerance as the fact that within a period of five years under Jonathan, the PDP had six national chairmen and the circumstances under which one left the post for the other spoke to the temperament of a President who used and dumped them at will. The point he failed to grasp was that making powerful enemies within his own party was not going to help his cause. Of the six PDP chairmen under his watch, the one most ill-treated was Nwodo whose woes began in September 2010. The trigger was a letter from INEC that it would not recognise the existence of the PDP executives in eight states. Nwodo and Jonathan agreed on fresh congresses in those states.

In a letter dated September 27 and titled, ‘Re: Inconclusive State Congresses,’ the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had notified the PDP leadership of states whose executives were illegal. After highlighting the anomalies in the conduct of the congresses, the letter, signed by INEC Secretary Abdullahi Kauguma, concluded, “In effect, the Commission may not accept the actions and decisions of Peoples Democratic Party, PDP, State Executive Committees in Anambra, Bayelsa, Delta, Enugu, Imo, Kogi,

Oyo and Plateau States until executives are elected in line with relevant provisions of your Party's Constitution.”

The National Chairman's insistence on fresh congresses in the affected states was met with opposition from the governors who felt they could ignore INEC. Nwodo later recalled that, “In the midst of that, a governor visited me with cash and cars which I turned down. A few days later, I addressed the media where I warned that no governor should try to induce me or any party official. With that, a gang-up against me had started and the President called a meeting where I was made to apologise to the governors.”

The Chairman explained to the party that the process for selecting their candidates was very crucial and that a situation in which some people would just sit down and handpick candidates was not good for the country. Thinking the matter had been resolved, he went about his business but the governors were not pacified. It didn't help Nwodo's situation that his home state of Enugu was among those on the INEC list. In the end it was the Enugu governor, Mr Sullivan Chime, who was assigned the task of getting rid of the Chairman. On the eve of the party convention, an Enugu High Court, presided over by Justice Reuben Onuorah, granted an interim injunction restraining Nwodo from parading himself as a member and officer of the PDP. The order followed an *ex parte* motion brought by one Mr Collins Amalu on the grounds that Nwodo was not a card-carrying member of the party.

Nwodo reveals that after a meeting he had with Jonathan, he was asked to keep a low profile while efforts were made to vacate the order. But those who contrived the judicial fiasco were also not relenting, and the judge was incommunicado.

With no firm word on the morning of the convention that the court order had been vacated – by Nwodo's account – he handed his speech over to Dr Haliru Mohammed Bello, the Deputy National Chairman of the party. It was based on this that, as the convention opened that evening, Bello proceeded to declare the

convention open. But a mild drama ensued when Nwodo appeared on the podium to take the microphone from him.

Nothing could have prepared Nwodo for what happened next. He was summoned to the holding room at the basement of the Eagle Square where he met a livid Jonathan and his aides. Nwodo was accused not only of deliberate sabotage but also of working for Atiku's ambition. Nwodo later shed some light on what propelled him towards Eagle Square on that day, "I recall I spoke to the President and his wife the night before the convention where I told them that with the court order that had become a problem, I would not come to the convention. His wife was insistent that I should come but I knew the right thing to do was stay away. But the next day, as all the delegates gathered at the Eagles Square, I got a call from the AGF, Mohammed Adoke, who said the order had been vacated. That was why I rushed to the Eagles Square to take the speech from my deputy."

When Adoke was summoned and questioned, he denied saying the order had been vacated in the call he made to Nwodo. Jonathan walked out on Nwodo and summoned him to The Villa the next day. The former Chairman's fate was sealed. Of the following day's meeting with Jonathan, Nwodo disclosed, "After I explained to him what happened the previous day, he said my continued stay as PDP Chairman had become a problem. I asked him whether I should resign and he answered in the affirmative. His wife called me later, asking me not to resign. Unfortunately, her husband had already arranged for a NEC meeting the next day where a motion had been prepared for my removal. But there were people who argued that it was wrong to do anything in my absence. While they were still arguing, my emissary arrived with my letter of resignation."

Adoke dismissed Nwodo's claim, saying the latter "must have forgotten what happened or he was mistaking me for someone else. Otherwise, he would know I could not have told him that". The former Attorney General of the

Federation insisted that he was brought into the whole controversy by President Jonathan, who had asked him to liaise with Nwodo, to see how the contrived order could be vacated. “In the process, it was Nwodo’s Special Adviser, Bala Buhari, a former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, who misled him. The matter was before the Enugu High Court and in case Dr Nwodo has forgotten, he was actually the person who called me to say Bala told him the order had been vacated, not the other way round. I recall saying to him that if Bala had confirmation that the order had been vacated then so be it,” Adoke countered.

The former AGF said he was aware of a problem between Nwodo and Jonathan, dating back to the day the PDP National Working Committee granted a waiver to Atiku to participate in the 2010 presidential primaries. On 15th September 2010, after a meeting of the PDP National Executive Committee, the party had released guidelines for its presidential primaries in which the major highlight was the waiver granted Atiku to contest the primaries. “President Jonathan said the decision to grant the waiver to Atiku²⁶ was done without his knowledge even though Nwodo claimed he told him. That was where the problem between them started, but on the issue of Enugu court order, I had nothing to do with the claim made by Nwodo and I want you to put that straight” Adoke said with finality.

Nwodo made known his disappointment that the President failed to appreciate the fact that he was a victim of a conspiracy by governors, with Chime leading the charge. To prove his innocence, Nwodo petitioned the National Judicial Commission (NJC) on the conduct of Justice Onuorah but vindication took five long years.

On 16th November 2015, Justice Onuorah was found guilty of gross abuse of power in granting the *ex parte* order, sheer incompetence in handling judicial proceedings, deliberate contempt over pending applications and manifest bias in the manner he treated Nwodo’s case. The then Chief Justice of Nigeria,

Justice Mahmud Mohammed wrote to Justice Onuorah, “You allowed your court to be used to defeat the purpose of justice in the matter...and at the end the Council decided that your acts did not promote public confidence in the integrity and impartiality of the judiciary. Therefore, you are hereby warned by Council to desist forthwith from such acts in future.”

For Nwodo, the NJC’s decision was like medicine after death as he had retreated quietly from the party following the manner in which he was humiliated. He was not alone. So many people were similarly treated and they left to swell the ranks of the opposition. Meanwhile, less than two months in office, there was already speculation that President Jonathan might actually be plotting a second-term. On 13th July, 2011, it was reported that the presidency had concluded plans to send a bill to the National Assembly for a single term of seven years for governors and presidents.

The speculation was confirmed by the President’s Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Dr Reuben Abati, who said in a statement that the proposed bill was “borne out of a patriotic zeal, after a painstaking study and belief that the constitutionally guaranteed two terms for Presidents and Governors is not helping the focus of governance and institutionalization of democracy at this stage of our development.” Abati added that the President was concerned about the level of acrimony that the four-year election cycle generated at federal and state levels. The question that dominated the political space at the time was, why would a government that had barely spent two months in office be concerned about the issue of succession?

Harping on the eligibility of the President to run for the next election before even completing his first year in office, some politicians from the South-South were quick to re-open the sensitive issue of zoning. To be sure, it was General Muhammadu Buhari who actually upped the ante while receiving a delegation of his political party from Niger State. “They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should

(happen) again in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood,” he declared.

The “the dog and the baboon” reference sparked fierce reactions from many Nigerians. A sign of northern solidarity emerged even within the PDP, an indication of what was to come. Following their meeting in Kaduna, the Northern Governors Forum argued that Buhari had only sought to keep the Federal Government on its toes in order to ensure a free-and-fair election in 2015. The NGF Chairman, Babangida Aliyu, a member of the ruling PDP, who spoke on behalf of his colleagues, suggested that Buhari only meant that government “should not go and do bad election.”

While rationalizing Buhari’s statement, which he admitted was subject to different interpretations, Aliyu cautioned Nigerians against further inflammatory statements that could heat up the polity. “Again, certain facts are understood, that if this happens that would happen; I think it is a natural thing to do. Maybe those who may be too concerned have not looked at what other eminent Nigerians have been talking about. I saw one that said Nigeria is going to be *Somalianised*. I saw another one who has been talking like there would be war tomorrow. That statement should be taken on its own value,” Aliyu asserted.

The intervention by the northern governors came after the PDP and the presidency had issued strong statements to condemn Buhari. Incidentally, the controversy arose at about the same period the issue of Jonathan’s eligibility to run in 2015 was already on the front burner. In a court affidavit on 15th April 2012, Jonathan had declared that he was only serving his first four years as President as allowed by the 1999 constitution. He added that he had not announced his decision on whether he would seek a second-term of four years in 2015.

In the suit before Justice Mudashiru Oniyangi of an Abuja High Court, a PDP member, Mr Cyriacus Njoku, had in his prayers said Jonathan was

already in his second-term, having taken the oath of office twice – first as President after the death of Yar'Adua, and secondly after he was declared winner of the April 2011 Presidential election and subsequently sworn into office. Njoku's argument was that it would be unconstitutional for Jonathan to be administered the oath of office a third time.

Although Jonathan had not declared that he would seek another term, what that court case did was to draw him out and from what transpired, it was clear that he had not foreclosed the option. That signalled to the opposition, especially from the North, that Jonathan might be considering running again. That also gave them enough time to begin the planning of how to counter such eventuality.

By helping to push so many people away, the handlers of Jonathan were acting in ways that suggested naivety to the politics of the time. But it was in the manner in which Jonathan fuelled the crisis in the Nigerian Governors Forum that helped to galvanise the opposition that would later upstage him at the polls.

[23](#) Between 2007 and 2011, Ihedioha was Chief Whip while Tambuwal was his deputy. The roles were later reversed in June 2011 when Tambuwal became Speaker and Ihedioha was elected as his deputy.

[24](#) Dogara is the current Speaker, House of Representatives.

[25](#) Sylva had overwhelmingly won the January 2011 Bayelsa State PDP governorship primary, but because his election was deferred till 2012 at the time Jonathan had been elected President, he was disqualified from participating in a fresh governorship primary conducted by the party for 'security reasons'.

[26](#) The eligibility clause in the PDP Constitution stipulates a two-year period for someone who decamps from another party to be able to contest election on the platform of the party, except such a person is granted waiver by the National Executive Committee (NEC). It was the waiver that allowed Atiku to contest the primaries having contested the 2007 presidential election on

the platform of AC after leaving the PDP.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROAD TO OPPOSITION MERGER

When the first set of elections into the Fourth Republic was conducted in 1999, not only did the PDP win the presidency, it also cleared most of the other elections. For instance, the party won 241 of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives and 71 of the 109 seats in the Senate. The party also produced 21 of the 36 states governors. Four years later, the fortunes of the PDP had improved significantly as it won 223 seats in the House of Representatives, 76 seats in the Senate and produced 28 of the 36 governors. The remaining eight states were shared between three political parties²⁷.

However, by 2011, the law of diminishing returns had set in, such that PDP's margin had declined as it won 208 seats in the House of Representatives, 71 seats in the Senate and produced 23 governors. To the extent that these still represented more than 60 percent of the electoral spoils for the then ruling party, the opposition parties realised that there was no way any of them, acting alone, could dislodge the PDP from power at the centre. Therefore, it became clear that the only way to stand any chance against the PDP was to form a formidable coalition. The main question was, given the character of the Nigerian politician, could such an idea really work?

Against the background of Nigerian political history which was replete with failed alliances and mergers, not many people believed in the feasibility of such an option. In the First Republic, the attempts by the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) to form an alliance against the then ruling Northern People's Congress (NPC) ultimately failed because of the inability to present a joint presidential candidate.

In the Second Republic, following the victory of the National Party of

Nigeria (NPN) at the 1979 presidential election, there was a working accord with the Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP), especially at the National Assembly. Eventually, the accord collapsed. In the build-up to the 1983 presidential election, there were attempts to form a People's Progressive Alliance (PPA) as an opposition platform by the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), People's Redemption Party (PRP), Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) and the NPP. It was another futile bid.

There had been several attempts at mergers since 1999, but it was not until the 2011 presidential election that serious efforts were made to consummate such arrangement, with Buhari and Tinubu as the principal movers. Given what many Nigerians knew about his militaristic disposition, the last person expected to join politics was Buhari. But late in 2002, he announced his intention to run for the presidency, even though picking the presidential ticket of the defunct ANPP came with its own drama.

On 7th January 2003, the ANPP held a national convention in Abuja to nominate its presidential candidate for the 2003 general elections. From all indications, Buhari had been promised the ticket by the party's 'caucus' and this became even clearer when the ANPP Governors came up with the "consensus" option.

The idea was for one of the contenders, the late Dr Chuba Okadigbo, to be paired with Buhari as running mate while others would withdraw from the race. This did not go down well with one of the presidential aspirants, Chief John Nnia Nwodo²⁸. Before announcing his withdrawal from the race, Nwodo dismissed the process that had characterized the convention as totally without transparency. "As I speak to you now, all of you wearing accreditation cards do not have your name on it. It could be dashed to anyone. As I speak to you, none of you has seen a dummy of the ballot paper that you are about to vote with. As I speak to you now, all presidential aspirants have been denied the opportunity of effective participation in arriving at this so-called consensus. In

all humility, my brothers and sisters, I do not lend my name to this charade. I cannot stand on this ballot to disgrace the democratic process”, Nwodo declared, to the shock of party leaders.

Following Nwodo’s bombshell, which was being watched by many Nigerians on live television, other presidential aspirants like the late Chief Edwin Ume-Ezeoke, Owelle Rochas Okorocha, Chief Pere Ajuwa and Chief Harry Akande also took turns to express their displeasure at the farce that the primaries had become while announcing their withdrawal from the stage-managed event.

It was a distraught but defiant Buhari who mounted the rostrum to castigate the aspirants that were querying the credibility of the process through which he emerged. It was not lost on Nigerians that Buhari still had a lot to learn if he indeed wanted to be a politician. It would take him 12 years and three electoral defeats before learning that lesson.

While planning his third attempt in 2011, Buhari decided that he was going to run on the platform of a party he could call his own. In a letter dated 30th January, 2010 and addressed to ANPP’s National Secretary, Senator Saidu Kumo, Buhari made clear the reason for his decision to quit ANPP.

Despite having had the privilege of flying the party’s flag as its presidential candidate on two previous occasions (2003 and 2007), “there have emerged some fundamental and irreconcilable ideological differences between the leadership of the party and myself, as a result of which the vast majority of the membership have been sidelined in the scheme of things pertaining to the party.” This, Buhari let it be known, had substantially eroded his capacity to render any meaningful service to the country on the platform of the party. “It is as a result of the above that I have taken the painful decision of withdrawing my membership of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) with effect from Monday the 1st day of February, 2010,” he concluded.

By the time Buhari wrote that letter, it was already an open secret that he would join the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), one of the then newly registered political parties led by close associates, Senator Rufai Hanga, Chief Mike Ahamba and Eng. Buba Galadima. In addition, many political pundits felt that for Buhari to make any meaningful impact against Jonathan, the then incumbent President and candidate of the ruling PDP, he (Buhari) would have to forge a coalition with ACN and possibly ANPP. It was expected that the ACN, which had massive support in the South-West, would work for Buhari's CPC at the election so that the two groups could share power in Abuja if the alliance defeated the ruling PDP.

In Buhari's own words, the CPC "was founded on my authority by my political associates as a solution to the debilitating, ethical and ideological conflicts in my former party, the ANPP". He promised that the new platform "will lead to the founding of a broad-based platform on mutually agreed terms for the purpose of re-defining and balancing political competition in Nigeria on ideological bases."

When the CPC and ACN began their negotiations on the eve of the 2011 presidential election, there was national excitement. Even though Jonathan, by virtue of the circumstances that brought him to office, enjoyed a measure of popular nationwide support, there were also many Nigerians who craved the "alternation effects" that had by then earned Ghana respect in the comity of democratic nations and because of that were rooting for Buhari. But it would be the fire next time, as the alliance talks between the CPC and the ACN ended in recriminations and name calling, and momentum was lost.

Prof. Pat Utomi, one of those that worked for the alliance efforts, noted that the first obstacle encountered could be located in the attitude of some key persons within the leadership of the opposition parties who failed to put the National Interest above their personal selfish interests. Although Buhari was hugely popular in the North and there were elements in other parts of Nigeria

that admired his strength of character, Utomi cautioned that, “This popularity which attracts mammoth hysterical crowds at the mere appearance of the man in northern Nigerian locations particularly, cannot be translated to political victory at the polls without adequate political organization to back it up.”²⁹

In putting the whole episode in context, Tinubu believes that the alliance could have worked if there was good faith on the part of the CPC leadership at the time. “In any marriage or partnership, there is usually a spirit driving such union and that is the spirit of sharing. But in the middle of negotiation, the CPC pre-emptively announced the choice of Pastor Tunde Bakare as the presidential running mate,” said Tinubu in my chat with him. That decision, he added, “roiled the waters and severely complicated matters because a crucial part of the negotiations and our understanding of the partnership was that the vice presidential candidate would come from our side or at least we would have a substantial input into the selection process.”

The announcement of Pastor Bakare as the CPC presidential running mate undercut the efforts at joint working between the two parties. “I remember that Chief Bisi Akande was so livid that he was asking them, ‘What then is the alliance for?’” recounted Tinubu who explained what transpired in the course of negotiations that took several days. “The choice of Pastor Bakare, we were made to understand, was to pacify the Nasir El-Rufai wing of the CPC that came from the ‘Save Nigeria Group’, but it wasn’t one we could accept in the circumstance, and we made that very clear,” said the former Lagos State Governor matter of factly.

With the benefit of hindsight, Tinubu reflected that what the CPC could have done “was bring Pastor Bakare to us prior to making the announcement, while explaining the rationale that made him their preferred choice for the VP position. Perhaps, we would have examined the idea. Instead, the decision, when made public had the effect of a *fait accompli*.”

Tinubu pointed out that in the course of the entire negotiations, Pastor

Bakare “was never present and as the person whose actions and acceptance of this decision was most pivotal, his absence from the talks concerned us. When we insisted on the slot, all they kept saying was that Pastor Bakare would resign, but again no specific plan or timeline was given for this. Because of this impasse, talks ultimately dissolved and we went our separate ways in the 2011 elections.”

Tinubu clarified that ACN insisted on the CPC making the position vacant “for the ACN to fill, as that had been the initial understanding of how this partnership would be structured. We had no business with the precise manner in which they would rescind the announcement of Bakare. The crucial point was that the VP slot should be available for the ACN. Eventually, it became obvious that CPC was unable or perhaps unwilling to surrender the number two slot.”

At one point during a meeting with key national figures who were urging for the merger, according to Tinubu, he emphasized that the ACN had bent and shown flexibility on all other issues as far as possible. “I remember very vividly that I told these figures, ‘Dear Leaders, you invited us to this meeting, and for the sake of the country, I have tried to bend over backwards to accommodate your positions. But you are asking me to surrender my two legs for amputation and you are not even ready to provide a wheelchair to take me home.’”

Alhaji Buba Galadima, the founding CPC National Secretary, corroborates Tinubu’s account. According to Galadima, shortly before the 2011 election, an alliance committee was formed, with Sule Hamma³⁰ leading the CPC wing and Tinubu leading the ACN, to look at the possibility of an electoral cooperation that would guarantee solid votes from the North-West and North-East where Buhari had huge following and the South-West where Tinubu’s ACN was in control. “We also had an internal committee within the CPC, which I chaired, to develop a memo for the selection of a vice presidential

candidate. We were looking for a respected Christian from the South-West to balance both religion and geo-politics for General Buhari,” Galadima informed.

Problems began to emerge when, while the committee was still examining the options, Buhari announced Pastor Bakare as his running mate. “Without any consultation, Buhari in his typical impulsive manner announced the name of Pastor Bakare, who we had rejected in the committee because we felt he would not be an electoral asset.” Galadima touched on the argument against Bakare by most members of his committee, “He did not get along well with most of the Pentecostal pastors and was viewed with suspicion by leaders of the orthodox churches he had at different times attacked in his television sermons.”

Having presented a *fait accompli* on the issue of running mate on the one hand, and faced with Tinubu’s insistence that the VP position be reserved for ACN on the other, the CPC came up with the idea of a post-dated letter of resignation from Pastor Bakare. Galadima owned up, “The idea was mine and that of Sule Hamma. We drafted the letter even though Buhari resisted the idea. He would not even allow Pastor Bakare to come to the party secretariat. But there was nothing they could do because as the secretary of the party, it was my responsibility to submit the names of candidates to INEC. The alliance failed because of the way Buhari handled the issue of running mate, but the accusation that Tinubu wrote the letter for Pastor Bakare is false; it was myself and Sule Hamma that did.”

The fiasco was the beginning of an internal crisis within the CPC, as summed up by Galadima, a former ally of Buhari but who fell out with him because, as he claims, the retired general has little or no sense of collaboration or compromise. “For the 2011 elections, he unilaterally picked most of the gubernatorial candidates, especially in the core northern states and despite my resistance, he sidelined the party’s process for the exercise,” Galadima

revealed.

However, Aminu Bello Masari, the current Governor of Katsina State, who was also part of the negotiations, argued that the problem was not Buhari but rather that time was not on their side. Masari submitted that, “Despite the realization that the only way the PDP could be defeated was to have a coalition of opposition parties working together, we left the talk for such a platform till practically on the eve of submission of candidates’ list to INEC. That was the main problem even though there were other issues.”

Masari further suggested that within the ranks of each of the opposition parties in discussion were persons opposed to the idea of a merger that would result in them losing whatever little power they had. “That was aside the fact that the PDP and the presidency were also working behind the scenes to ensure that the merger idea did not succeed. I was leading the team from CPC discussing with Tinubu and his group. Others with me from CPC were Hadi Sirika and Farouk Adamu while from on the ACN side were Governors Segun Osoba, Kayode Fayemi, Niyi Adebayo and Bisi Akande,”³¹ said Masari, who argued that the choice of Pastor Bakare as running mate was less a problem than the fact that the ACN had already nominated Nuhu Ribadu³² to be their presidential flag-bearer.

The Katsina Governor admitted to being aware that the ACN leaders had difficulty asking their presidential candidate to step down and were urging Buhari to discuss with Ribadu. “They were saying Buhari should discuss with Ribadu, who meanwhile was busy campaigning on the point that it was the time of the younger generation. As far as we could see, there were no real indications that Ribadu would withdraw even if the ACN had been given the vice presidential slot,” Masari argued.

Following the breakdown of talks with the CPC, President Jonathan, who was seeking to contest on the platform of the PDP, came into the equation of the

ACN. There were reports that he actually offered Tinubu money, a claim the former Lagos State Governor disputed very strongly. “It is true that Jonathan approached me with his team at a time. Perhaps they learned that we had been disappointed in how our talks with the CPC ended. And who knows, they could have had a hand in how the whole negotiations unravelled. When Jonathan’s overture came, I brought in my team and we gave him the conditions under which we would not actively oppose him but we would never openly support him.”

Tinubu listed some of the conditions, including: the construction of the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, granting of special status to Lagos in the true spirit of fiscal federalism and the designation of Lagos as an oil producing state. “He agreed to these terms. There is no question of money or other personal benefit to me. I challenge anyone to come out and say that Jonathan gave me money in 2011 or offered me anything of value. Any such claim is a blatant lie. You can quote me on that.”

The main complication in this deal was that the ACN already had a presidential candidate in Nuhu Ribadu, so there are questions as to how the national leader of a party could leave his own candidate for another person, but Tinubu did not see it that way. He insisted that Ribadu was aware of all the negotiations. “We were interested in fielding him because of his local and international image that we believe would help the country. But he also had his misgivings because, as he said, many people in the North were seeing him as a spoiler who would diminish the votes of Buhari. He wasn’t comfortable with that.”

Tinubu asserted that it was he and a few others within the party that convinced Ribadu to take the ticket in the first place, as there were splits in the ACN over the presidential slot. “People like then Governors Kayode Fayemi and (Babatunde) Raji Fashola³³ solicited that Nasir El-Rufai be our candidate. Because El-Rufai was already identified with the CPC and for other

reasons, most of the party leadership preferred Ribadu,” Tinubu explained. In spite of it all, it was Jonathan who won the majority of South-West votes.

El-Rufai’s reflections on the turn of events contradicts that of Tinubu because, as far as he is concerned, it was “the ACN leadership who double-crossed Buhari and the CPC” in the negotiations preceding the 2011 presidential election. He also debunked the insinuation that he had any political ambition in the period preceding the 2011 general election.

Narrating what he knew at the time – since he was not close to Buhari and was merely a distant CPC sympathizer by virtue of his association with Pastor Tunde Bakare – El-Rufai indicated that the agreement between CPC and ACN was that while the former would hold convention and pick a presidential candidate without a running mate, the latter would hold a convention without a presidential candidate, “because the Action Congress (AC), as the party was known at the time, was to produce the running mate in what was to be a joint ticket. That was the agreement.”

El-Rufai stated that he was aware that a few months before the beginning of talks, the AC leaders had been in Dubai to seal a deal with Ribadu who had long held presidential ambition. “When we were putting the Good Governance Group together in 2009 with Ken Nnamani and Aminu Masari, among others, I had Nuhu (Ribadu) in mind as a potential presidential candidate and had a team in place with offices in 33 states, but behind our backs, Nuhu went and met with Tinubu to accept the AC presidential ticket.”

By the time the AC had their convention during which they added “Nigeria” to the party’s name and nominated Ribadu as their presidential candidate, El-Rufai felt it was evident that there was a breach of good faith in the negotiations with CPC. “For me, that was the deal breaker. I know the pressure that was brought on Pastor Bakare to accept being running mate to General Buhari. He didn’t want the job and I was one of the people who persuaded him to take it,” said El-Rufai, who further claimed to be the one who told Buhari

that Pastor Bakare was ready to step down for ACN candidates. “I remember Tinubu and his people had left for Lagos and we made frantic efforts to bring them back. I recall seeking the intervention of the Awujale of Ijebuland and the Oba of Lagos but by then, time was no longer on our side,” said El-Rufai.

Incidentally, one of those who worked tirelessly to make that 2011 alliance between Tinubu and Buhari work was Colonel Sambo Dasuki (retd.), who would later become the National Security Adviser to Jonathan. El-Rufai expressed the belief that, following the collapse of the merger talks, both Tinubu and Ribadu worked for Jonathan. “Tinubu of course gave the votes from Lagos and a few other South-West states, except Osun, to Jonathan, while the calculation of Ribadu was to reduce Buhari’s votes in the North even though he failed on that score.”

To El-Rufai, the experience of the 2011 election so shattered Buhari that he was initially reluctant about revisiting the idea of any merger talk with Tinubu. “But I was part of a group that persuaded him that without the alliance with South-West, of which Tinubu remains very critical, there was no way there could be any serious opposition platform to defeat the PDP. General Buhari eventually saw our point and I was part of the team that encouraged him to visit Tinubu at his home after receiving the Silverbird Lifetime Award along with General Danjuma and others in Lagos,” explained El-Rufai, currently Governor of Kaduna State.

It was after that ice-breaking visit that people from both sides began to work on the merger of the ACN and the CPC. Working with a few other people, El-Rufai wrote the first memo for the CPC on how to approach the merger and the individuals, beginning with Tinubu, who were central to making such political marriage work.

The El-Rufai Committee, which, at the instance of Buhari, examined the prospects of a mega party, noted that the combination of CPC and ACN “represents the only hope of the ordinary Nigerian for the change in our

nation's trajectory; away from state failure to good governance, and improved economic and social conditions". By their estimation, what had become clear from the conduct of the PDP "is that unless the opposition parties set aside their differences to unite, each one standing alone will be targeted for destruction, one party at a time."

The ten-page memo dated 30th June 2012 and titled, "The ACN-CPC Merger: Preliminary Roadmap," was signed by El-Rufai and became the framework on how to enthrone a credible and formidable opposition for the 2015 general election. It was underpinned by the idea that while Buhari remained the only politician trusted by the widest spectrum of the ordinary citizens in the North, the Tinubu-led ACN was seen in the entire South-West, parts of South-East and South-South as the only political party capable of initiating meaningful change.

By the projection of the El-Rufai Committee, the South-East would likely coalesce around APGA "which could then negotiate with, or merge into the PDP while the ethnic minorities in the North could pitch their tents with the PDP, hoping that Senate President David Mark would secure the presidential ticket if Jonathan was pressured to give up his second-term aspirations in favour of a candidate from the North."

X-raying the dynamics at play in the ANPP, the El-Rufai Committee projected that the Borno branch could align with the PDP to protect the personal interest of former Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. "This situation will hold as long as Governor (Kashim) Shettima has no option. The Zamfara branch is in tension because while its godfather, Senator Ahmed Sani wishes to merge with the PDP to advance his personal political career, the incumbent Governor is reluctant to do so, fearing a citizen backlash to his second-term bid in 2015. The Yobe branch which supports the national leadership of the ANPP under Dr Ogbonaya Onu financially seems to be non-aligned," stated the committee, which dismissed the Labour Party and its lone Governor, Olusegun

Mimiko of Ondo State who was predicted (quite correctly as it turned out) to end up in PDP.

The El-Rufai Committee further predicted that “an initial ACN-CPC merger will galvanize other sceptical opposition parties to join, encourage many unhappy PDP members to pitch their tent with us, and mobilize a frustrated citizenry to send the PDP packing at federal and state levels.”

However, the committee also laid down some ground rules that should guide the merger. Firstly, the leadership of the ACN and CPC must put all their cards on the table, including an honest discussion about individual expectations and personal ambitions which must then be aligned with the overall national interest. Secondly, the spirit of give-and-take, compromise and rationality devoid of ego must guide the discussions. “While the CPC has a tour de force of a leader in GMB (Buhari), the ACN has superior organization, structure and control of political resources. However, both parties and leadership must approach the merger in the spirit of ‘equality of the parties and the leaders’ at national, state and lower levels.”

Thirdly, the committee took the view that the issue of candidature for the presidency would need to be explored only on the surface based on multiple scenarios at a given point in time. “While it is vital for CPC supporters and northern voters to be continuously hopeful of a GMB (Buhari) candidacy in 2015, there is the need to ensure that the merged parties do not have presumptive presidential and gubernatorial candidates, as that could discourage the political elite from joining the merged entity in large numbers. It is a delicate messaging challenge which the party leadership and spokespersons must handle with utmost care and skill.”

Ahead of the merger announcement, it was also recommended that the leadership of the two parties “should immediately unfold publicly a ‘cooperation pact’ starting with the creation of a joint legislative and governorship forum, and common strategy towards all the forthcoming

elections and by-elections till the conclusion of the merger negotiations. Accordingly, it is suggested that both Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT) and General Muhammadu Buhari (GMB) should plan a joint visit to Edo State to campaign for and endorse Comrade Adams Oshiomhole for the July 2012 governorship election. The chairmen of the parties in the state should be directed to begin working together immediately towards the defeat of PDP in Edo State.”

Another recommendation was that the leadership of CPC and ACN in the national and state assemblies should be directed to commence working together, meeting at least weekly, to develop common legislative agendas and render monthly reports to the chairmen of CPC and ACN, and GMB and BAT as national party leaders. The mode of cooperation envisioned by the committee “has already been decided by the followership of the two parties and the Nigerian citizenry craving for progressive change.” In which case, “only a full merger of the two parties will address this need. Any form of electoral alliance, adoption of common candidates or migration of the membership of the two parties to another party will not serve this national need. It appears from all the feedback nationwide that it is either merger or political hopelessness.”

Looking beyond a two-party merger involving only CPC and ACN, the committee also explored the possibility of a three-way (including ANPP) configuration or four-way (including APGA/UPGA) one. It weighed up this pros and cons thus, “The advantage of merger involving more than ACN and CPC at one go is that such a step will reduce uncertainties around the name, logo and symbol of the emergent platform. However, it will take a longer time-span and increase the chances of sabotage by the PDP and betrayal by self-seeking political contractors.”

Though positively disposed to the idea of a merger of several parties, the committee counselled that a CPC-ACN merger should conclude before

allowing others to join. “While we must continue to engage the ANPP and APGA/UPGA and other parties, we must move on with our timeline and when they are ready to join, make the necessary concessions to accommodate them. The two parties should also consider a back-up plan of migration to one of the parties, a new party or an existing shelf party in the event that the PDP sponsors court actions to delay the holding of the special conventions required by the Electoral Act for the consent to the merger,” it wrote.

The efforts evidently paid off. Tinubu confided that after the 2011 presidential election, he felt convinced that those around Buhari got the message that they had been led into a strategic miscalculation. Some of them began to reach out to Tinubu’s bloc. “Aside Adamu Adamu and Babachir David Lawal, most of the others who started the efforts for us to resume talk are not big names that you would know and they are not even holding any serious positions in government today,” the South-West political supremo intimated.

Buhari had said that the campaign leading up to the 2011 election would be the third and final shot at the presidency. Not long after the election, he changed his mind. Tinubu knew the run of play, “It was that small clique that succeeded in persuading Buhari that they could make a political marriage work between him and myself, and had enlisted the support of our mutual friend, the late Emir of Borgu, Haliru Dantoro, who became the father of the merger.”

As elucidated by Tinubu, the late Emir kept putting pressure on him and Buhari, and the monarch facilitated their first one-on-one meeting in Kaduna. “Without the late Emir of Borgu, there was no way I would go to Kaduna. Dantoro had earlier invited both Buhari and myself to his daughter’s wedding in Borgu where we had our first exploratory talk. As Buhari and I talked, Dantoro was begging us to work out a political arrangement by which we would work together and that we should start early.”

It was also Dantoro’s suggestion that Tinubu and Buhari could indeed run

together on the same ticket since what they were working on was a partnership. “While I told Dantoro that I had to go back to report to my people, the idea had been formed very early that Buhari and I would run as president and vice president; it was to be a joint ticket. That was what the earlier negotiation was predicated upon,” Tinubu explained.

While it was clear that Tinubu worked for the election of Jonathan at the 2011 presidential election, even justifying the arrangement thereafter, it did not take long for things to fall apart between them. The relationship deteriorated to the extent that, by September 2011, Tinubu found himself arraigned before the Code of Conduct Tribunal sitting in Abuja. He was charged with false declaration of assets by not disclosing certain accounts with the Code of Conduct Bureau between 1999 and 2000, an offence the prosecution flagged up as contrary to the provisions of the 1999 Constitution.

A defiant Tinubu defended himself against the charges, arguing that the case was politically motivated. Two ACN governors, Abiola Ajimobi of Oyo State and Rauf Aregbesola of Osun, were at the tribunal to witness the trial, which eventually ended in an acquittal. The political warhorse was free to plot his next move. Tinubu took on the Jonathan government as an enemy that had to be fought to a standstill, and this also fuelled his gravitation towards the formation of a strong opposition platform. By this time, the proposed merger was attracting other interested parties like the ANPP and a section of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) led by the Imo State Governor, Okorocha.

The road to a merger was quite tedious. The provisions in Section 84 of the Electoral Act, 2010 (as amended) prescribe stringent conditions that must be satisfied, beginning with a formal letter of intent request to INEC. The written request, to be signed jointly by the National Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the different political parties proposing such a merger must be accompanied by: a special resolution approving the merger passed by the national

convention of each of the political parties proposing to merge; the proposed full name and acronym, constitution, manifesto, symbol or logo of the party, together with the addresses of the national office of the party, and evidence of payment of administrative costs of N100,000 or as may be fixed from time to time by an Act of the National Assembly.

On 5th February 2013, ten state governors drawn from the different political parties and across geo political zones in the country met at the Lagos State Government House for over four hours, and resolved to endorse the merger initiatives by their various political parties. In a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting and read to newsmen by Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State, it was agreed that there was a need to form an alliance that would enable them unseat the PDP in the 2015 general election.

Apart from Rochas Okorocha who had broken away from the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), others in attendance were: Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State (ACN); Ibikunle Amosun of Ogun (ACN); Abdul-Aziz Yari of Zamfara (ANPP); Umaru Tanko Al-Makura of Nasarawa State (CPC); Rauf Aregbesola of Osun State (ACN); Abiola Ajimobi of Oyo State (ACN); Degere Alkali, who represented Ibrahim Gaidam of Yobe State; and Kashim Shettima of Borno State (ANPP). Altogether, four political parties were represented at the meeting and would go on to form the opposition platform together with the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN) which later joined them.

Absent were the Ondo State Governor, Dr Olusegun Mimiko of the Labour Party (LP) and then Anambra State Governor, Mr Peter Obi who chose to remain in APGA. They were not invited. The communiqué read in part, “We, the governors from 10 states of the federation rose from a meeting at the Lagos House, Marina, today, Tuesday, February 5, 2013. Having reviewed the situation in our country, we resolved that to rescue Nigeria is a task that must be done. As progressives and patriotic leaders of our people across party, religious and geo-political zones, we are extremely concerned about the state

of the nation and we put our heads together in the interest of our people to deliberate on what can be done to rescue our country. As governors, we fully endorse the merger initiatives already commenced by our various political parties and we will put our weight behind these efforts. Nigeria is greater than all of us and we have a duty to make it work for our people and the future of our children yet unborn.”

Three weeks later, on 28th February, the ten governors converged in Maiduguri, the Borno State Capital, reiterating their irrevocable commitment to the emergence of the new political party. They also announced a donation of the sum of N200 million to Borno and Yobe States for emergency relief and support to victims of the Boko Haram insurgency, before accompanying their host, Governor Shettima, on a solidarity visit to the popular Maiduguri Monday Market, where they were given a rousing welcome by the elated market men and women. The team also visited Government College, Maiduguri, where the governors were introduced one after the other to the pupils who were also excited to receive them.

The APC, which was at that period chaired by Chief Tom Ikimi, constituted three committees. The first one on the constitution was headed by Chief Segun Osoba with Hon. Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba as secretary. Other members included Dr Chris Ngige, Chief John Oyegun and Chief Akpan Udoedehe. They were to examine the constitution of the merging parties as well as the constitutions from political parties in successful democracies with a view to adopting useful provisions.

The manifesto committee headed by Chief Audu Ogbeh had Senator Hadi Sirika as secretary. Other members were: Dr Usman Bugaje, Hon. Abike Dabiri, Chief Achike Udenwa, Alhaji Ibrahim Gieda, Prof. Tam David West and Mr Osita Okechukwu³⁴. The legal constitutional compliance committee headed by Mr James Oholi, SAN, had Governor Kashim Shettima as well as Messrs Ahmed Yerima, Okoi Obono-Obia, Celestine Omehia and Martin

Agbaso as members.

On 31st July 2013, INEC announced the registration of the All Progressives Congress following the successful merger of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), a section of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), the Democratic Peoples Party (DPP) and the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC).

The registration of APC changed the political landscape. Between them, the five parties that formed the APC controlled eleven states: Lagos, Ogun, Ekiti, Oyo, Ogun, Edo, Imo Nasarawa, Borno, Yobe and Zamfara States. Perhaps more significantly, while the PDP at the time still controlled 23 states, APC with eleven had more “national spread” because it had at least a state in each of the six geo-political zones. The PDP had no state in the South-West at the time, and that led to the efforts to get the Labour Party-controlled Ondo State to cross over.

However, the registration was not an easy process. First, a group calling itself the African Peoples Congress (APC) filed a letter of intent at INEC, in an attempt to hijack the name APC and cause problems for the promoters. Then, another group going by the name All Patriotic Citizens which shared the same APC acronym also filed a letter of intent to be registered as a political party with INEC. But the opposition merger vowed never to let go their name and acronym, since they were the first to announce to Nigerians and the whole world the name of their new party-to-be. They insisted that the name and acronym remained their intellectual property.

In his book, ‘From Opposition to Governing Party: Nigeria’s APC Merger Story’, Ogbonnaya Onu³⁵ discussed the delicate negotiations that eventually culminated in the registration of the APC with each of the merging parties and groups coming with its own proposals, especially on the issue of the acronym. “Each emerging partner wanted the new name to be as close as possible to its old name. In accepting the new name, each merging partner became satisfied

only when it contributed at least one word. In accepting the name, All Progressives Congress (APC), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) was satisfied that it contributed ‘Congress’. The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was happy that it contributed ‘All’. Even though ‘All’ had only three letters, it was the leading word in the new name. The Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) felt satisfied that it contributed ‘Progressives’. Also, the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) was satisfied that it contributed ‘All Progressives,’” wrote Onu.

Even while that may appear simple on the surface, Onu contends that “those who have participated in negotiations of this nature know how complex this could be because just as individuals have egos, so also do political parties. The acronym APC became acceptable because all merging partners saw a bit of themselves in it. Most of them contributed two of the letters. None contributed more.”

Keen to start on the right footing, the APC organised a national summit in Abuja where their guest speaker, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, described political parties in Nigeria as mere labels rather than vehicles for social mobilisation, and she used her audience to drive the point home. “Have we not all seen how the only distinguishing factor in your politics is the acronym of your parties? Regardless of what anyone may promise about ‘change’, it cannot be confidently accepted by citizens who watch in utter dismay the migratory dance by politicians moving from one party to another seeking where their personal benefits are best guaranteed.”

She therefore enjoined the APC leaders to go beyond how to seize power from the PDP to thinking of how they would make a difference in the lives of Nigerians if given the mandate. “The discussion which you should be leading the country to have is how we must end the painful state of elusive development of Nigeria and improvement in the lives of citizens. Anything other than that is the same. It will prove that your parties are nothing more than

mere platforms for securing access to the largess of the state that politicians quickly ‘pocketize’. How will you tackle the greatest obstacles that have made development elude our nation?” she asked.

That question, I would assume, is still haunting the APC leadership today. But back in 2014, the mantra was “Change!”

[27](#) The AC had three governors, the ANPP two and APGA one.

[28](#) Chief Nwodo, a former Information Minister is the current president-general of Ohanaeze Ndigbo, a pan-Igbo socio-cultural organization.

[29](#) A post on his Facebook page titled, “For the record: Why ACN/CPC negotiation failed” – posted on 14th April 2011.

[30](#) Hamma is a retired bureaucrat who was in 2003, 2007 and 2011 the Director General of Buhari’s presidential campaign organization.

[31](#) Sirika is currently the Minister in charge of Aviation in Buhari’s cabinet; Osoba is a former Governor of Ogun State; Fayemi, who was at that period Governor of Ekiti, is currently the Minister for Solid Minerals; Adebayo was also a former governor of Ekiti State while Akande, former governor of Osun State chaired the ACN and the APC briefly at formation.

[32](#) Ribadu was the founding Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

[33](#) Fashola, former Governor of Lagos State, is currently the Minister for Works, Housing and Power.

[34](#) Ogbeh is current Minister of Agriculture; Sirika, Minister of Aviation; Dabiri, Special Adviser to the president on Diaspora; Udenwa was former Imo State Governor and also a former minister; David-West was a former Petroleum Minister under Buhari as Head of State, while Okechukwu is Director General of the Voice of Nigeria (VOA).

[35](#) Onu, a former Governor of Abia State, is the current Minister of Science and Technology.

CHAPTER FOUR

REVOLT OF THE PDP GOVERNORS

It was the second time Mr Asishana Bayo Okauru, the Director General of the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF), would be invited to meet with the then PDP Board of Trustees Chairman, Chief Tony Anenih within a period of one week. The agenda remained the same: how to stop the Rivers State Governor, Mr Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, from seeking re-election as the NGF Chairman. While Okauru maintained his stance that he was only a staff of the NGF and had no say in the choice to be made by the Governors, Anenih was adamant that Amaechi could not continue to be Chairman.

This was in May 2013 at a time when the chairmanship of what started as an informal club of governors had become a contentious national political issue. Okauru ventured, “Sir, why don’t you ask Amaechi to nominate another governor since you feel this strongly about the issue?” Anenih replied, “We have tried to do that but the silly boy nominated Kwakwanso³⁶. The President would rather Amaechi continue than have that one (Kwakwanso) become the NGF Chairman.”

Interestingly, Anenih’s position, and by implication that of the presidency, conflicted with Okauru’s proposal of nominating a chairman from another party outside the ruling PDP, but Anenih, who insisted that the majority party would not negotiate away the chairmanship.

Before Okauru left Anenih’s residence, he asked whether the presidency was backing Alhaji Ibrahim Shema³⁷, the only other candidate who had collected the form to contest besides Amaechi. “You mean Yuguda³⁸ has not collected form?” the BoT Chairman reportedly asked, before elaborating that

President Jonathan preferred Yuguda to Shema who was considered “too soft”. Meanwhile, Shema had not been told of the development and was still campaigning among his colleagues. That would later bring about its own complications from which Amaechi benefitted.

A day to the election, Senator Bukola Saraki, a former chairman of the NGF, called Okauru to ascertain the position of the secretariat on the election. The DG expressed neutrality, informing that, “I have already written to INEC to give us transparent ballot box and to send observers. I have also completed the process for the printing of 36 ballot papers to be used for the election.”

Asked who he thought would win, Okauru said it was difficult for him to call. Saraki then said, “You can tell Amaechi that three governors are key to his re-election and they are Niger, Kano and Jigawa. If he loses two of those three, he should not bother contesting.” It was not a message Okauru was interested in passing on, especially at a time when the NGF was facing its biggest challenge.

In a conversation with me years later, Okauru acknowledged that the days preceding the May 2013 NGF chairmanship election were the most difficult of his life. As he was pulled from pillar to post by governors, “The conclusion I could draw from that experience is that it would be very difficult to have free and fair election in Nigeria. For an average politician, it is victory at all cost and they don’t even factor in that for every contest, there must be winners and losers.” Asked if he advised Amaechi not to run, Okauru replied, “Even though that is not within my place to do but because Amaechi and I had been friends before he became the NGF Chairman, I spoke to him in confidence about whether it was not better for him to withdraw, especially when I saw the way some close friends of his were changing camps.”

By Okauru’s calculation, if the election had been held on the first day, Amaechi would have secured the support of no fewer than 30 governors, but the moment it became clear that Aso Rock was involved, the equation started

changing. “Amaechi himself told me that Governor Liyel Imoke came to him to say he would withdraw his support because Jonathan had spoken to him and there was a fund Cross River State was seeking that could be denied if he (Imoke) stayed with him (Amaechi). Up till tomorrow, Amaechi respects Imoke for that honesty because he was the only governor who told him why he was withdrawing his support,” Okauru said.

In view of the lack of support from President Jonathan, some governors tried to persuade Amaechi not to run. The message was passed directly to Amaechi himself through several intermediaries, as he confirmed to me. But the more they pushed, the more adamant Amaechi became. That was how an election for the chairmanship of what was no more than a social club became a national political contest that pitched the President against a governor from his own geo-political zone.

The problem between Amaechi and the presidency started in an innocuous manner. In the course of a two-day visit to Rivers State on 9th August 2010, the President’s wife, Dame Patience Jonathan, engaged Amaechi in an open altercation in Okrika, her hometown. The governor was explaining why there would be some demolitions in the town to make way for new schools proposed by the Rivers State government when Dame Patience Jonathan snatched the microphone from him and shouted, “Listen, you must listen to me!”

A clearly embarrassed Amaechi stood still while Dame Patience Jonathan railed at him, “I want you to get me clear. I am from Okrika. I know the problems of my people. So, I know what I am talking (about). I do not want us to go into crises. We are preaching peace and we must maintain peace at any time. But what I am telling you is that you always say you must demolish. That word ‘must’ you use is not good. It is by pleading. You appeal to the owners of the compound because they will not go into exile. Land is a serious issue.” By the time she was done, the First Lady had whipped up sentiment within the community against Amaechi’s plan.

From that day, the battle-line was drawn between the two. Mrs Jonathan had made it clear that she would not tolerate a governor from her state who would not bow. And it was not in Amaechi's nature to be easily muzzled. Compounding the problem was the loss by Rivers State of 46 oil wells to Abia State and the ceding of five oil wells in Soku to Bayelsa State. Amaechi believed his state was being punished for his political stance, most of which arose as a result of his chairmanship of the NGF. He took the battle public and raised the stakes.

At every opportunity, Amaechi spoke about the way the presidency was working against the interest of the people of Rivers State, all because of a personal disagreement with him, "46 oil wells belonging to Rivers State have just been given to Abia State. Soku is a Kalabari town in Rivers State. 71 oil wells in Abonnema (headquarters of Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State) would have been given to Bayelsa State on the same Monday the Kalabari people went to Abuja to protest." He added that, "There is rumour that they are emasculating me because of 2015. It is unfortunate. For now, I have no plan for 2015. If they are taking Rivers oil wells because of 2015, they should leave us alone."

This was the fractious atmosphere under which the NGF election was conducted on 25th May 2013.

Some background may be useful at the point. The Nigerian Governors Forum started around Year 2000 as an informal association of equals with then Nasarawa State Governor, Alhaji Abdullahi Adamu, as the first Chairman. Adamu's emergence was not by any election and the tradition of consensus was sustained for a long time. The NGF was operated in an informal and bipartisan manner; in fact, almost like a fraternity in which all were for one and one for all, regardless of political party.

There was no better demonstration of this than the 2007 presidential election when all the governors decided that since one of their own, Alhaji

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua³⁹ was contesting the presidency on the platform of the PDP, they would contribute money to support him. And they all did, not minding their different political party affiliations and despite protestations by the then Sokoto State Governor, Attahiru Bafarawa, who said he was also a presidential aspirant. His colleagues apparently saw his aspiration as a joke and hence paid no attention to him. Such was the camaraderie among the governors.

With no formal structure at the beginning, Adamu brought in some personal staff as the secretariat of the NGF and remains to date the longest serving chairman. But when, in 2004, some of the governors felt that Adamu was getting too close to President Obasanjo, he was removed and replaced by Obong Victor Attah, then Governor of Akwa Ibom. There was no procedure, just a few governors colluding and announcing to their colleagues that Adamu had to be removed. Someone proposed Attah there and then, and he became Chairman. Attah himself later lost the chairmanship in similar fashion. In fact, he was said to have excused himself to use the restroom at a gathering of the governors only to return to be told that the then Edo State Governor, Chief Lucky Igbinedion, had replaced him as the Chairman.

While the NGF continued in this informal tradition, Governor Bukola Saraki was plotting his way not only to get the chairmanship but also with an agenda to transform it into a powerful institution. When in 2007 the tenure of Igbinedion expired along with that of many other Governors, Saraki, who was then going for his second-term as Kwara State Governor, became Chairman by unanimous decision.

Emerging the NGF Chairman at a period a former gubernatorial colleague and close associate was also becoming president put Saraki at a vantage position. And so it was that by virtue of his friendship with Yar'Adua, Saraki was a powerful NGF Chairman. This was to become a problem the moment Yar'Adua fell ill. Some governors who were close to then Vice President

Goodluck Jonathan plotted Saraki's removal. It was Jonathan's first intervention in the politics of the NGF but he did not show his hands, at least not directly.

Following a meeting held at the Ogun State Government Lodge on 30th October 2010, Governor Gabriel Suswam announced that Governor Gbenga Daniel of Ogun State had become the NGF Chairman. With Governor Akpabio of Akwa Ibom standing by him, Suswam told reporters that a change in the leadership of the forum became necessary since Saraki had indicated interest to contest the 2011 presidential elections. Suswam noted further that from the moment Saraki announced his presidential ambition, the forum had not been able to take decisions on crucial national issues. "Take for instance the 1st October 2010 bomb blast in Abuja and other national issues, we could not comment because we had no chairman to speak for us," Suswam said on camera.

When I asked Suswam whether or not he was acting on behalf of Jonathan at the time, he indicated that the Governors just felt that what Saraki was doing was wrong. "We wanted the governors to come together and speak with one voice on the political crisis in the country and he would not call a meeting. Of course, speaking with one voice at the time would be in favour of Jonathan but that was not our motivation," Suswam clarified.

But Saraki would not go down without a fight. Immediately he learnt of the move by a few governors led by Suswam, the Kwara governor began to reach out and he succeeded in getting the support of three prominent but non-PDP Governors: Babatunde Fashola of Lagos, Adams Oshiomhole of Edo and Ibrahim Shekarau of Kano. The three agreed to counter the statement by the Suswam group, which they did. After that, Saraki directed the NGF secretariat to call for an emergency meeting.

A day before the meeting, Oshiomhole issued a statement to discredit the purported election of Daniel as NGF Chairman. "If 16 or 17 PDP governors

met at a venue that was never a venue of our meeting – Governor Gbenga Daniel’s governor’s lodge – and claimed that they have elected him as Chairman, then it’s wrong. I have no quarrel with Governor Gbenga Daniel or any governor who wishes to be Chairman of the forum, but I expect that anyone who nurses such ambition should be able to persuade some other governors to accept him or her as Chairman,” Oshiomhole stated.

Governor Shekarau, in a statement through his media aide, also dismissed the election of Daniel. “A situation where some PDP Governors could sit and take a decision on behalf of 36 Governors is not acceptable. More so, the forum is not only for PDP Governors but all Governors, including those from other political parties as it is a nonpartisan forum,” noted Shekarau, who added that he “recognizes only Governor Bukola Saraki of Kwara State as the Chairman of the forum.”

While Saraki refused to speak, he got the NGF to issue a statement where he called on the general public to disregard media reports about the purported election of Daniel as NGF Chairman. The statement highlighted that the strength of the NGF depended on its inclusiveness. It further mentioned that “for the NGF to continue to play this critical role in the politics and governance of this country in the future, its leadership must be positioned to readily inspire the confidence of all its members and be seen to be guided by laid down standards of democratic practice.”

When the meeting eventually held, it was very clear that Saraki was in a showdown with Jonathan’s supporters. He was specifically accused of being on the side of the so-called “Yar’Adua Cabal” that was preventing the Vice President from taking the reins of power at a time when President Yar’Adua was marooned at a Saudi Arabia hospital with no access to ascertain his true state of health. One governor said at the meeting that he had information that there could be a military coup that would dismantle the entire democratic structure if the political crisis was not properly handled with a handover to

Jonathan.

It was a testy meeting but what was clear was that for the first time, the presidency (under Jonathan) had shown direct interest in the politics of the NGF. Saraki explained his position and what he was doing behind the scenes. At the end, a compromise was reached: there would be a Deputy Chairman for the Forum. Saraki raised no objection and Mr Peter Obi of Anambra State was nominated and confirmed. The expectation was that Obi would succeed Saraki who had just a few months left in office.

However, a few weeks to the end of his tenure, Saraki asked the NGF to sound out the Governors if they would honour him by coming to Ilorin for his last meeting where he would hand over to his successor and they all agreed. Initially, Saraki thought Obi was going to succeed him but he got feelers from the presidency that the PDP was not ready to cede the NGF chairmanship to the opposition.

With that, there was a proviso that whoever would emerge must secure the support of at least one governor from his zone. That proviso was specifically enshrined to block Peter Obi, then in APGA, from emerging the NGF Chairman. The thinking was that Obi was not going to get the support of any of his colleagues from the South-East who were all PDP Governors. That calculation turned out to be misplaced as Obi was able to rally the South-East governors to endorse him.

A letter of endorsement was signed by his four colleagues from the zone: Theodore Orji, Martins Elechi, Sullivan Chime and Ikedi Ohakim. Addressed to Saraki, with the title, "Nomination of Mr Peter Obi," the letter read, "We, the governors of the South-East of Nigeria wish to respectfully nominate Mr Peter Obi, Governor of Anambra State of Nigeria as a candidate for the position of Chairman, Nigerian Governors Forum. Our action in this regard is unanimous as a zone and is borne of our firm conviction that he will discharge the functions of this office with credibility, dedication and due diligence".

Behind the scenes, prior to the Ilorin meeting, Saraki had anointed Amaechi as his successor. Meanwhile, Peter Obi, who had travelled to London to see the ailing (now deceased) Dim Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu,⁴⁰ arrived Ilorin expecting to take over from Saraki. Nonetheless, he was not surprised when, the moment the meeting began, Governor Isa Yuguda of Bauchi State nominated Amaechi and Governor Timipre Sylva of Bayelsa State seconded. “Liyel Imoke had told me the moment I arrived Ilorin that the situation had changed because the PDP leadership was insisting on having their member as NGF Chairman” Obi told me. He added that, disappointed though he was, he saw no need to challenge the decision that was taken by about 13 governors. “No governor from the South-East was present, but there was no other nomination, and with that NGF chairmanship was decided in favour of Amaechi.”

Two years down the line, the relationship between Amaechi and Jonathan had broken down irretrievably. And the President told the governors that whatever it would cost, Amaechi had to go. That was the background to the election of 25th May 2013 at the Rivers State Governors Lodge, Abuja. At the end of the acrimonious exercise, Amaechi defeated the surprise contender, Jonah David Jang of Plateau State by 19 votes to 16 votes.

Although the idea of Jang, who was said to have been reluctant, was believed to have been prompted by Akpabio, it was a bad choice given the unpopularity of the Plateau State Governor among many of his colleagues from the North who took objection to what they considered his ethnic and religious politics. Three of them voted against Jang at the secret ballot.

With the exception of Governor Ibrahim Geidam of Yobe State, who was absent and did not send any representative, 35 other Governors were either present or represented by their deputies. The Zamfara State Governor, Alhaji Abdulazeez Yari, was elected Deputy Chairman. His rival for the position, Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo State, voluntarily withdrew from the race after Jang’s defeat.

Yuguda provided an insight into what happened when he announced his withdrawal from the Northern Governors Forum on grounds of betrayal. “For the remaining two years of my tenure I will not be part of the Northern Governors Forum. I want any northern governor to come out and say ‘Yes, I voted against Jang’. I will then ask him why, after sitting with me in the northern governors meeting and agreeing on a consensus candidate, after saying Shema and I should withdraw for Jang, he then went and voted against Jang. I would like to know why.”

Following Amaechi’s election, the presidency decided to fight back. First, a high court sitting in Abuja sacked the Chief Ake-led Rivers State Executive Committee of the PDP considered loyal to the Governor and upheld his rivals led by Felix Obuah as the duly elected state executive committee. Immediately after that court decision, the National Chairman of the party, Alhaji Bamanga Tukur hurriedly inaugurated the rival state PDP executive committee in Abuja.

However, a crisis was precipitated when five members out of 32 attempted to impeach the Speaker, Otelemaba Amachree⁴¹. In a pre-emptive move by forces supportive of Amaechi, the House of Representatives in July 2013 took over the functions of the Rivers Assembly by invoking section 11, sub section 4 of the 1999 Constitution⁴².

The crisis was escalated on 31st August 2013 when the governors of Adamawa, Kwara, Sokoto, Jigawa, Kano, Rivers and Niger stormed out of the PDP Special National Convention. Joined by Atiku, the governors were protesting the decision to disqualify many of the aspirants vying for the 17 available National Working Committee (NWC) positions, because they were seen as opponents of Jonathan’s second-term aspirations. The next day, Abubakar Baraje, a former PDP Chairman, released a statement on behalf of the group, asking Jonathan to forgo his 2015 presidential ambition because it was “not in the best interest of the country.”

The group was to continue its agitation but eventually two of the governors, Aliyu of Niger and Lamido of Jigawa, stayed back in the PDP while the remaining five (Murtala Nyako of Adamawa, Magatakarda Wamakko of Sokoto, Kwankwaso of Kano and Amaechi) eventually left the party to join the APC.

On why only five of the seven governors who started the G-7 within the PDP joined the opposition party, Amaechi reasoned that every one of the governors had his own agenda. “There were those who wanted to be president. There were also those who felt we should form a different political party. My point was that such an idea would not hurt Jonathan because at the end of the day, we would just be playing into his hands by splitting the votes. There was no way a new party would win so I felt that rather than waste our time and energy, it was better to join what was at that period a growing opposition party in the APC. I was the one who pushed them in the direction of Buhari who in any case I actually liked for his discipline and stance on corruption. For me, staying in PDP was no solution,” Amaechi concluded.

With many of the governors taking sides with Amaechi, the development would prove very costly for Jonathan in the build-up to the general election in which Nigeria’s sectional politics was going to be a defining issue.

[36](#) Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso was the Governor of Kano State who contested the APC Presidential primaries and after losing, sought the party’s senatorial ticket and is now a senator.

[37](#) Shema was the governor of Katsina State and a close ally of President Jonathan.

[38](#) Isa Yuguda was the governor of Bauchi State, and was then an ally of President Jonathan.

[39](#) Yar’Adua, a second-term governor of Katsina State who was drafted into the PDP presidential primaries by Obasanjo. He went on to win the primaries and the election that followed but died in office on 5th May 2010.

[40](#) Ojukwu led the Biafra secessionist plot that led to the three-year civil war in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970.

[41](#) The whole plan was to impeach the speaker after which the five members would then conduct a kangaroo impeachment of Amaechi, who would then be bundled out of office by the police, following which he would be advised to go to court.

[42](#) The session was chaired by Deputy Speaker of the House, Emeka Ihedioha

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION

Fielding questions during his third Presidential Media Chat broadcast live on national television on 24th June 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan gave ammunition to the whispers of his opponents that he was comfortable with corruption. Asked why he was yet to declare his assets publicly, Jonathan dismissed the question, arguing that it was a matter of principle. “It is not the President declaring his asset that will end Boko Haram and whether I am criticized from head to toe I will not declare my assets publicly. It is not right; I didn’t even want to declare my assets as VP but was forced by the then President (Umaru Musa Yar’Adua). The law is clear. A public officer should declare his assets, and if there are issues, then the relevant agencies would have a basis to assess whether you have amassed wealth or not,” he said.

Pressed further by his interviewers that he had a moral obligation as the public demanded it, Jonathan shocked the nation with an uncharacteristic impetuosity, “I don’t give a damn about it. The law is clear about it and so, making it public is no issue and I will not play into the hands of the people. I have nothing to hide. I declared under the late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua because he did it, but it is not proper; it is not the President declaring assets that will change the country.”

Not surprisingly, that phrase – “I don’t give a damn about it” – became the highlight of the session while the manner in which he reacted revealed a surprisingly erratic temperament. It further gave a lot of room for unfavourable interpretations of Jonathan’s stand on corruption in a nation where citizens like their leaders to ‘fight corruption.’

What made the issue even more poignant was that four months earlier, on

27th February 2012, WikiLeaks⁴³ had started publishing State Department files of e-mails from American embassies across the world dating between July 2004 and late December 2011. Some of the revelations in the secret US Embassy dispatches on Nigeria concerning Jonathan were unflattering, to put it mildly.

For instance, in one sent by Ambassador Robin Sanders dated 1st December 2009, it was written, “Dark rumours about Yar’Adua’s health have given way to broad fears that Yar’Adua is likely entering his final days. Even if he defies the odds and returns to resume his duties, at least nominally, his authority has taken such a battering that he would be hard pressed to keep rivals in check, much less enforce his writ in government and the party. We will report on December 2 Vice President Jonathan’s chequered past as a corrupt and ineffective state Governor and his options in the current situation.”

In yet another dispatch a few days later, Sanders wrote about reports reaching the embassy that Yar’Adua was in a coma and on a respirator which did not bode well for any recovery. She added that, “Jonathan’s dispatching emissaries around town to take a temperature check on the atmosphere surrounding what may be his, sooner rather than later, ascendancy to the Presidency further leads to the news that the President of Nigeria is in his final days. We are preparing a report (septel) on the baggage that Jonathan will carry with him into State House as there have been past reports of corruption, political thuggery, and payments to ‘militant factions’ from his days as Governor of Bayelsa State as well as questions about his competency in general.”

Perhaps the most damaging US embassy cable released at the same period was the one which read, “In September 2006, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) seized USD 13.5 million from Dame Patience Jonathan at an airport. Reports indicated the money was laundered through an associate; Jonathan managed to distance himself from the deal. The anti-graft

commission investigating the source of the money has reported no findings to date.”

By refusing to make public his assets declaration at a time these WikiLeaks reports were in the public domain, Jonathan easily played into the hands of the opposition that had started to define him as a corrupt leader. That characterization hounded him throughout his tenure and would become a major campaign point in 2015. But if there was any corruption scandal that did incalculable damage to the credibility of his government, it was the mismanagement of the fuel subsidy funds.

The problem began on 13th October 2011 when the Senate asked its committees to investigate how the Federal Government overspent the budgeted funds on fuel subsidy by up to N1.1 trillion. Whereas about N240 billion was provided for the subsidies in the 2011 budget, government agencies responsible for running the scheme had by November spent up to N1.3 trillion, Senator Bukola Saraki told the Senate.

In the motion co-sponsored by 13 other senators, Saraki said reports by some prominent foreign economic journals and the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) revealed how volumes of fuel imported into Nigeria were being inflated fivefold and then smuggled out before being sold at higher prices in neighbouring countries after collecting huge sums of money as subsidies from the government. With Saraki’s motion, the red flag was raised.

Although the issue of subsidy fraud was relatively muted, on 1st January 2012, Nigerians were ushered into the year by an abrupt increase in the price of premium motor spirit (PMS), commonly called petrol. And with that, critical stakeholders – including organized labour unions and civil society groups – responded with anger and condemnation, vowing to challenge the Federal Government by calling for a nationwide strike.

That prompted the House of Representatives to convene an emergency

session on Sunday, the 8th of January 2012, and decided among other things, to probe the management of the fuel subsidy scheme in order to unearth and tackle the structural and procedural deficiencies therein.

To achieve these objectives, the House set up two ad-hoc committees. The first, headed by Hon. Patrick Ikhariale, was to interface with the executive arm of government and the labour unions so as to find a common ground on what had become a serious national crisis. Other members of this committee were: Ajibola Muraina, El-Badawy Hassan, Onawo Mohammed, Aminu Sulaiman, Peter Akpatason, Ogbuefi Ozomgbachi, Khadija Bukar Abba Ibrahim and Essien Ayi.

The second ad-hoc committee, headed by Hon. Farouk Lawan, was to verify and determine the actual subsidy requirement and monitor the subsidy regime. It had seven other members. They were: John Enoch, James Faleke, Abbas Tajudeen, Abubakar Sade, Ali Ahmed, Gerald Irona and Eucharia Azodo. Incidentally, the scope of the committee was limited to cover only three years, from 2009 to 2011, while the Terms of Reference (TOR) was simply “to verify and determine the actual subsidy requirements and monitor the implementation of the subsidy regime in Nigeria.”

The Lawan Committee conducted its sessions in public (beamed live on television), and received memoranda from Nigerians from all walks of life. The committee also invited major stakeholders in the oil industry to testify before it. From the Federal Government side, some of the principal testimonies were taken from the then Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; then Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke; then Attorney General of the Federation, Mr Mohammed Bello Adoke, SAN; two Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) Deputy Governors at the time (Dr Kingsley Moghalu and Mr Tunde Lemo); then Chair of the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), Mrs Ifueko Omougui-Okauru; then Director General, Budget Office of the Federation, Dr Bright Okogu; then Chairman of

the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission, Mr Elias Mbam, and the then Group Managing Director of the Nigeria National Petroleum Commission (NNPC), Mr Austin Oniwon. Some other officials who testified included heads of relevant institutions (NPA, Customs, PPPRA, PPMC, PEF etc⁴⁴) who had something to do with subsidy. From the private sector were former Finance Minister, Dr Kalu Idika Kalu, and legal practitioners, Mr Femi Falana, SAN and Mr Olisa Agbakoba, SAN.

Other stakeholders invited to the hearing (and who testified) included 93 oil marketers and importers, senior officials from the Nigerian Navy, the auditors appointed by the Ministry of Finance to verify subsidy claims, members of the professional bodies in the downstream oil sector, foreign oil traders, officials of the Nigerian Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress, as well as the managing directors of the Port Harcourt, Warri and Kaduna refineries.

In all, the committee took testimonies from 130 witnesses and received in evidence 3,000 volumes of documents between 16th January and 9th February 2012, before submitting its report to the House on 19th April, after sitting for three months. The House adopted the report on 24th April 2012.

In the course of the House investigations, which generated lavish media headlines, different figures were bandied by different institutions on the total amount spent on petrol subsidy in 2011. However, the CBN Deputy Governor at the time, Dr Kingsley Moghalu, revealed in his testimony on 25th January 2012, that the figure spent on petrol subsidy as at 31 December 2011 was N1.7 trillion. “I am aware there have been some testimonies here giving different figures but as the banker to the Federal Government, the CBN should have the correct figure. And though we need to get through documents for the exact figure, the amount approximately is N1.7 trillion”, Moghalu stated. The exact sum was later revealed as N1.736 trillion.

An uproar followed revelations from the submission of the House report which indicted top officials, especially the Minister of Petroleum Resources,

Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke. But the presidency was merely defensive in its reactions to what had become a serious public issue. On 9th December 2013, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Aminu Tambuwal, responding to questions at an anti-corruption roundtable, observed that President Jonathan's "body language seems to be encouraging corrupt practices in the country."

Tambuwal gave specific examples to justify his claim. "Take the subsidy probe, the pension probe, the SEC (Security and Exchange Commission) probe and recently the bulletproof car cases. After the House of Representatives did a diligent job by probing and exposing the cases, you now see something else when it comes to prosecution. In some cases, you have the government setting up new committees to duplicate the job already done by the (National Assembly). By the action of setting up different committees for straightforward cases, the President's body language doesn't tend to support the fight against corruption."

Coming from a high official of government who at that time still publicly identified with the ruling party, it was a heavy blow. Unfortunately, reports from government's own committees were similarly indicting. For instance, both the Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede Ministerial Verification Committee, which metamorphosed into a presidential committee, and the Petroleum Revenue Special Task Force headed by Ribadu, came up with damning conclusions.

By the end of their assignment, the most damaging was the Aig-Imoukhuede Committee, because it was populated by government officials, among them Mr Michael Arokodare, the NNPC Executive Director for Finance and Accounts; Mr Reginald Stanley, then Executive Secretary of PPPRA; Dr Abraham Nwankwo, Director General, Debt Management Office (DMO); Mr Jonah Otunla, the then Accountant General of the Federation; Dr Bright Okogu, then Director General, Budget Office of the Federation and Ms. Oyinye Ahuchogu of the Central Bank of Nigeria.⁴⁵

The Aig-Imoukhuede Committee eventually indicted 21 companies,

requiring them to refund N382 billion “wrongly collected” as subsidy in 2011. Some of the findings of the committee included the following:

- A dead vessel named MT LOUISIANA GETTY, which had been changed to PHILIP LOUSIANA since 1975 before she eventually died as duly reported by Lloyd’s List Intelligence, was used to conclude PMS import transaction in 2010 and 2011;
- The name of another dead vessel, KRITI AKITI, which had been changed since 17th April, 2010 before she was decommissioned and eventually died on 6th July, 2010 was also used for PMS import transactions in 2011;
- Masters Energy Oil & Gas Limited and Caades Oil & Gas Limited made subsidy claims using the same mother vessel – MT Zhen Star that could not be located on the Lloyds List Intelligence. This mother vessel’s bill of lading, dated 19th October, 2011 supposedly had 58,617.005MT of PMS. The total subsidy claims on the shipments was N3.9 billion;
- Two oil marketing and trading companies (Brila Energy Ltd & Nasaman Oil Services Ltd) benefited from subsidy payments using PMS purportedly discharged by two mother vessels off the coast of Cotonou, whereas these mother vessels were at that period located in China and in the South Pacific using the Lloyds List Intelligence Vessel tracker.
- There were shore tank reports confirming discharge into the depot, yet there was no mother vessel bill of lading in the file to support the alleged discharge of 17,781.63 MT based on which approximately N1.9 billion claim was paid;
- Some of the companies that received import allocations from PPPRA did not have any previous business or industry experience or even a track record of operations in the oil and gas sector;
- The tax clearance certificates (TCC) submitted by some of these

companies indicated that they were inactive in the previous three years (i.e. 2008 to 2010). This clearly shows that they were not operational prior to their submission of applications for the import allocations to PPPRA;

- A total of 314 transactions with related subsidy claims of N357 billion were found to have adequate documentation. However, there were disparities between the quantity of products discharged as evidenced by the DPR product certificates and as stated in the PPPRA's records (from the shore tank certificates). This implies that the imported volume of products used as a basis for payment of subsidy was not confirmed by the industry regulator;
- Documentation in respect of 500 transactions were not supported by DPR product certificates with related subsidy claims of N682 billion;
- A total of 112 transactions did not have evidence of sales proceeds based on banks' available records at the date of verification. The total subsidy claims in respect of these transactions was N158 billion;
- A total of 13 transactions belonging to eight customers as contained in PPPRA subsidy payment due schedule were disclaimed by banks. The transactions were not found in their records as at the date of the verification. The total subsidy claims for this category of transactions stood at N12 billion;
- 18 transactions with subsidy payments for the sum of N20 billion either had no shipping documents or evidence of payment for the products in foreign exchange;
- A bank cancelled two LCs belonging to Messrs Ceoti Limited and Ocean Energy Limited with Form M reference numbers MF886772 and MF1361356 respectively, when they did not receive shipping documents after five months. The transactions to the tune of N3 billion however still

featured on the PPPRA schedule of transactions for which subsidy was processed.

While several other infractions were detailed, the report was particularly indicting of the Federal Government on the issue of subsidy on kerosene, “In spite of a directive issued by President Yar’Adua on 15th June, 2009 that NNPC should cease subsidy claims on kerosene, PPPRA resumed the processing of kerosene subsidy claims in June 2011 and NNPC resumed the deduction of kerosene subsidy claims to the tune of N331.5 billion in 2011.”

The kernel of that conclusion was to knock the bottom out of the claim by Mr Alison-Madueke that Yar’Adua’s directive was not gazetted and so could not be implemented. The committee went further, “In addition, the distribution of DPK which was being imported solely by NNPC was skewed in favour of depot owners who have no retail outlets. Two-thirds of the kerosene sold by NNPC between 2009 and 2011 was sold to depot owners and ‘middle men’ who in turn sold the product to owners of retail outlets at inflated prices of between N115.00 and N125.00 per litre (compared to the ex-depot price of N40.90), leaving consumers to pay higher prices than the N50.00 per litre directed by Government.”

Other highlights from the report included, “Abuse of the due diligence process for applicants to the Petroleum Support Fund (PSF), lack of transparency in the process for import allocations, payment of subsidies to oil marketing and trading companies in spite of lapses in presented documentation and the inability of PPPRA to use effective vessel tracking tools to verify the status and location of the vessels supposedly used to import petroleum products and to compare such information with the details on presented bills of lading.”

The report noted that because Nigeria does not have a verifiable statistical basis for computing daily consumption of petroleum products, “The absence of this data opened up the determination of the nation’s requirement for imported

petroleum products to abuse. This situation, in conjunction with the absence of regulation of the amount of petroleum products imported by NNPC, led to uncontrolled importation beyond the country's requirement."

On the disposition of the government to his committee's report, Aig-Imoukhuede noted that President Jonathan seemed more concerned about the political pressure that ensued, "But I told him I have no regrets. My committee members and I had collectively agreed that we would be guided by the fear of God and the rule of law, and we felt satisfied with our outcome."

Various law enforcement agencies requested for copies of the report while some of the companies found wanting were subject to criminal investigation and prosecution. Despite threats he said came his way, Aig-Imoukhuede and his committee got the job done. He later outlined some of the gains, "Far reaching reforms were instituted by PPPRA, then under the leadership of one of our committee members. These reforms were very effective in reducing abuse, as a result of which subsidy claims in the next year reduced tremendously."

The banker commended the public servants that served on the committee, describing them as bold and uncompromising. Yet he hit a sombre note, saying, "In the absence of strong institutions, incompetent and self-serving public officials will continue to inflict incalculable damage on Nigeria's economic prospects. A few good men and women are not enough to stop them. We need a critical mass of committed and capable public servants to make a sustainable difference."

To worsen matters for the Jonathan administration, another committee it set up, the Nuhu Ribadu-led Petroleum Revenue Special Task Force, detailed how the Nigerian government and the NNPC were treating huge oil revenues accruing to the federation as a reserve of money that could be used for illicit purposes without accountability. Around the same time, Ian Craig, Executive Vice President, Sub-Saharan Africa Shell Exploration and Production Africa

Limited, said Nigeria was losing an estimated 150,000 barrels of crude oil every day to theft in the Niger Delta. “The greatest challenge, however, is the massive organised oil theft business and the criminality and corruption which it fosters. This drives away talent, increases costs, reduces revenues both for investors and the government and results in major environmental impact,” he noted.

For the Jonathan administration, it became a case of one day, one scandal. Not long after the subsidy scam, the Senate adopted the report of its committee on Public Accounts chaired by Senator Ahmad Ibrahim Lawan which investigated the misuse of N1.5 trillion by the Federal Government within a period of ten years, from 2002 to 2012. The three special funds accounts were the Stabilization Account, Ecological Fund Account and the Natural Resources Development Account. Although, most of the abuses did predate Jonathan’s government, that the scandal was coming to light under him only added to the public suspicion as to his administration’s lack of accountability.

The Senate committee had, for instance, discovered that the operation of the Natural Resources Account was grossly abused, as several releases were not related to what it was created for. Likewise, several approvals of funds disbursed from the Special Funds Accounts did not conform to the purpose for which the funds were established. The account had a balance of N120 billion in August 2010 but was depleted to N37 billion by October of same year.

Narrowing some of the major abuses to the Jonathan administration, the documents revealed that the Federal Government withdrew over N75 billion in September 2010 alone. A number of other withdrawals for the Federation Account Allocation Committee (*FAAC*) and the National Council on Finance and Economic Development (*NACOFED*) were backdated as payments for 2004 and 2005 activities. On 11th May, 2011, the sum of N242 million was withdrawn and “granted as loan to Inspector General of Police (IGP) for purchase of vehicles for UN peace keeping in Haiti-1st instalment.” Another

N33 million and N32 million were released on the same day to the IGP, according to the documents, as second and third instalments, again for purchase of vehicles.

As many of these revelations became public, the opposition wasted no opportunity in attacking the Jonathan government for corruption. Then to add more fuel to the fire; in October 2013, Princess Stella Oduah, Aviation Minister and staunch political ally of the President, was exposed in a transaction involving the purchase of vehicles by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCCA).

By December, the House of Representatives Committee on Aviation recommended the removal of Oduah over extra-budgetary spending, including the purchase of N255 million bullet proof cars. The embattled minister's natural instinct was to sit tight, but the scandal eventually swept her out of office in February 2014, leaving the President more vulnerable to opposition attacks over his seeming tolerance of corruption.

It didn't end there. More issues surfaced, one of them being the 16th March 2014 nationwide recruitment exercise of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), which was marred by tragedy, with 16 job seekers confirmed dead and scores of others wounded. At the root of it also were some unwholesome practices which Jonathan failed to address. It was one of the defining tragedies of the administration.

The then Minister of Interior, Mr Patrick Abba Moro, against all entreaties, refused to follow the known tradition of recruiting personnel into the service. Instead, he resorted to new methods that were weighed down and infested with fraud, deceit, corruption and abuse of power, as the decision to recruit was taken and the contract outsourced to a company called Drexel Nigeria Limited, with which the minister signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) without the input of the leadership of the NIS.

The Board of the Immigration Service, Nigeria Civil Defence, Prisons and Fire Service put the blame for the tragic deaths squarely on the shoulders of Moro. According to Mr S. D. Tapgun, a commissioner who led other board members as they appeared before the House of Representatives Committee on Public Affairs, the minister sidelined them in the tragic recruitment. “When we, the members of the board, learnt about the recruitment, we wrote the Minister that we are not in support of engaging the services of a third party to conduct recruitment for the Immigration Service, but he ignored our letter and went ahead to engage the consultant. The Consultant fixed everything, including a N1,000 fee, which they claimed was administrative charges,” said Tapgun who revealed that 693,000 applicants paid N1,000 each to designated banks to register for the recruitment.

Contrary to the general expectation that President Jonathan would relieve the minister of his job, Moro was actually allowed to remain in position to further infuriate the people. In defending himself against the allegations of the Immigration Service board, Moro said he had the authority to implement the decisions of the board because “the board is not different from the minister.” He added that the exercise was conducted with good intention, bearing in mind allegations of racketeering in previous exercises, but “we never knew that while we were planning, the devil had his own plans.”

There were conjectures as to why the president could not sack the minister. A former lecturer, Moro had been nominated into the cabinet by then Senate President, David Mark. According to a popular Abuja story, when the president called Mark that Moro had become a liability, asking for a replacement nominee, Mark was said to have told the president that there were other people in the cabinet who were also liabilities and if Jonathan could accommodate them, there was no reason why Moro should be sacrificed.

President Jonathan seemed frozen into inaction even as more scandals piled up. For instance, on 13th February 2013, the Senate gave the President a two-

day ultimatum within which to sack the Chairman of the Pension Reform Task Team, Mr Abdulrasheed Maina, from the Federal Civil Service. Mark spoke tough after a debate on a motion entitled, “Dismissal of Mr Abdulrasheed Maina for refusal to appear before the Senate” sponsored by Senate Leader, Victor Ndoma-Egba (SAN) and 107 senators, urging Jonathan to sack Maina from the public service. The upper legislative chamber said Jonathan risked dire consequences if he failed to end Maina’s tenure.

Mark declared that the Senate as an institution had been pushed to the wall and could no longer tolerate the insolence of public officials working for the executive. “The executive has to choose between the Senate and Maina. He has crucified himself. If Maina remains, then the Senate would react appropriately. The Senate is not lacking in ideas on what to do. Nobody in this country is bigger than our democracy. I have been extremely patient with Maina, so that when we react, they will know that we have been fair,” Mark told his colleagues.

Apparently mindful of the fact that he was sending a message not only to the Villa but also to Nigerians since it was in the full glare of media cameras, Mark threw a challenge to the Police about whether they would be on the side of the law or that of Maina, “This Senate is not going to allow this to linger, if in two days they (Police) have not done anything, we can come here and convene and take a decision. This Senate will bite when it needs to bite, and when we decide to bite, there will be no room for escape. We have been pushed to the wall. The reaction is the correct reaction; no matter the depth of the Maina situation nobody in this country will be left to go free, if he is associated with Maina, no matter who is behind Maina, we are not going to accept it.”

Earlier, the Chairman and the Co-Chairman of the Joint Committee, Senators Aloysius Etok and Kabiru Gaya, gave accounts of their experiences with Maina. Gaya said the committee received 7,800 petitions during its assignment

and that Maina coordinated the process of mismanaging pension funds. An exasperated Etok said of Maina, “We called him to account for his stewardship in all the offices he was overseeing. When we exposed some things, he decided not to appear again. Instead of appearing before the committee, he would go on the media, condemning the entire Senate. He said he was not given fair hearing, but when we offered him fair hearing, he refused. He drives two bulletproof cars, in a country where pensioners are hungry. He used N1 billion for jamboree in the name of verification abroad. He spends more than N8 million every two weeks on personal security.”

Maina was a true ‘fat cat’, seemingly untouchable. At the time the Senate was debating him, Maina was being driven around town, including to Aso Rock, in a convoy of several vehicles with a retinue of policemen. It was the one scandal that made many conclude that the Jonathan administration did not ‘give a damn’ about public perception.

After his failure to honour numerous invitations by the senate joint committee, the upper legislative chamber ultimately issued a warrant for Maina’s arrest, prosecution and sack. Days later, the House of Representatives followed suit and endorsed the decision of the senate for Maina’s arrest and prosecution. The lawmakers said in a motion that the House was “conscious of the need to present a common front with respect to the institutional integrity of the National Assembly” as they were “aware of the need to send a strong signal to the executive arm of the government of the resolve of the national assembly to stop impunity and disregard of due process in the conduct of government business.”

The President eventually caved in and gave the go-ahead for disciplinary action to be taken against Maina, who was dismissed by the Head of Service for absconding from duty and evading arrest. It was too little, too late. The harm to the administration was already done.

Explaining why he had to adopt a tough stance on the issue, Mark told me

that the senate committee had invited Maina several times and he would not come. “You know he is a very loud fellow who talks too much. He was all over the place, boasting about his connection to the Presidential Villa and he kept on bluffing the senate. To compound the issue, he was indeed seen driving in and out of Aso Rock in a convoy of vehicles with police escort. It was at a point when I couldn’t take the nonsense any longer that I decided on the letter to the President,” Mark disclosed.

However, if there was any scandal that hit the administration’s reputation the hardest, it was the state pardon granted the former Governor of Bayelsa State, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha in March 2013, perhaps because there was an international dimension to the issue. Back in July 2007, Alamieyeseigha pleaded guilty to a six-count corruption charge and was sentenced to two years imprisonment on each count. Earlier, in September 2005, he was charged with money laundering in the United Kingdom when the London Metropolitan Police found about N253 million in cash in his London home. Alamieyeseigha jumped bail and returned to Nigeria.

The United States government condemned the state pardon of Alamieyeseigha as a setback in the fight against corruption in the country and threatened to cut its aid to Nigeria. But Jonathan seemed oblivious of the implications for his reputation, and his reaction was very dismissive. His Senior Special Assistant on Media, Dr Doyin Okupe, said Jonathan had no apology for his action since “it is not all decisions parents take that are palatable for their kids. But with time they will realize that their parents are right.” Arguing that Alamieyeseigha had already been “deposed, hounded, tried and jailed,” Okupe asked, “What is wrong with giving pardon to a remorseful sinner? How come granting pardon to him has become an aberration? Is it because he is from Bayelsa? Is it because he is from South-South? Is it because he is connected to Mr President?”

The opposition was always quick on the draw to spotlight each and every

scandal. The biggest bombshell of all came in December 2013, when the then Central Bank Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi⁴⁶, wrote a letter to President Jonathan to alert him of \$48.9 billion that could not be properly accounted for, asking that there be an investigation.

When the letter became public knowledge, the national uproar prompted a Senate investigation. “The numbers were about \$65 billion exported by NNPC and about \$15 billion repatriated to Federation Account out of that. Now, with our duty as the banker of the government, we had the responsibility of alerting the President and request a thorough investigation of this matter,” Sanusi told the senate committee chaired by Ahmed Makarfi.

The issue dominated media headlines for weeks. The Finance Minister, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Petroleum Minister, Diezani Alison-Madueke disputed Sanusi’s claim. Okonjo-Iweala stated that the outstanding figure yet to be reconciled (but according to her, not missing) was \$10.8 billion. But from Obasanjo to Amaechi to Buhari and other opposition figures, many Nigerians weighed in on the side of Sanusi who was eventually hounded out of office before the expiration of his term.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding the explanations by the Jonathan government, it was easy for the public to believe that billions of dollars had been stolen from NNPC’s coffers, even when Sanusi did not expressly state that the unaccounted for sums were stolen. At the end, it was a scandal that dealt perhaps the biggest corruption blow to the Jonathan administration, and from which it never recovered.

⁴³ WikiLeaks is an international organisation that publishes secret and classified information from anonymous sources. Initiated in 2006, its founder, editor-in-chief and director is Australian Julian Assange, who is currently in exile at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. WikiLeaks claims a database of 10 million documents, and played a controversial role in the

2016 US presidential election.

[44](#) PPPRA is Petroleum Products Pricing Regulatory Agency, PPMC is Pipelines Products and Marketing Company, NPA is Nigerian Ports Authority while PEF is Petroleum Equalisation Fund.

[45](#) Other members of the committee were Mrs Sola David-Borha – MD/CEO, Stanbic IBTC Bank Plc.(Representing Banker); Mr Mike Osatuyi – National Secretary, IPMAN and Mr Obafemi Olawore – Executive Secretary, MOMAN

[46](#) Sanusi is now the Emir of Kano.

[47](#) On 20th February 2014, President Jonathan ordered the immediate suspension of Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi as CBN Governor, directing him to hand over to the most senior Deputy Governor, Dr Sarah Alade, who would serve as Acting Governor until the conclusion of an investigations into alleged breaches of enabling laws, due process and mandate of the bank. Some four months later, the Emir of Kano died and Sanusi was selected to succeed him despite efforts by the Federal Government to scuttle his enthronement.

CHAPTER SIX

OF BOKO HARAM AND CHIBOK GIRLS

When on 2nd May 2014, Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno got the invitation for a meeting with President Jonathan scheduled for the next day, he was excited that, at last, some solutions would be proffered to what had become a problem beyond the capacity of the state to handle. It was all the more reassuring that the Governor was asked to come along with the Borno State Commissioner of Police, the Divisional Police Officer for Chibok community, the Military Commander in Chibok and the Principal of Government Secondary School Chibok, Mrs Asabe Kwabura.

The meeting did not go quite the way Shettima envisioned it. President Jonathan's anger was palpable from the very first word he uttered, and the situation was not helped by the belligerent posture of the other people in the room. On the President's side were Vice President Mohammed Namadi Sambo, Senate President David Mark, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Anyim Pius Anyim and all the service chiefs.

By Shettima's recollection, what followed was more an inquisition than any attempt to find solution to a problem that had become an international embarrassment for the country: the abduction on 14th April 2014 of 276 girls from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok. 57 of the girls had escaped from their abductors while 219, between the ages of 15 and 19, were being held by Boko Haram terrorists in the vast Sambisa Forest.

The Governor's problem with the Federal Government had started some months before. After a meeting with Jonathan and military/security chiefs on 18th February 2014, an impassioned Shettima had told State House correspondents that while the men and officers of the Nigerian Army as well as

others security outfits were doing their best on the field of battle, Boko Haram fighters were better armed and more motivated.

Shettima's candour did not go down well with the military authorities, even though they would come to the same conclusion much later, after enormous damage had been done. "I am an eternal optimist but I am also a realist. Given the present state of affairs, it is absolutely impossible for us to defeat Boko Haram," Shettima had told correspondents, offering the opinion that the weapons available to the insurgents were more sophisticated than those being deployed by the Nigerian military.

Shettima's assessment was informed by the invasion a week earlier of Konduga, Dogon Bara, Izge and Bama communities of his state by Boko Haram insurgents. 300 people lost their lives. So heart-rending was the scene in Konduga that it was with tears that the Borno Governor presided over the internment of 33 bodies, even though before his arrival, some 18 corpses had already been buried at the Madarari wards in the same town.

According to media reports on the Konduga atrocity, Boko Haram insurgents, numbering about 200, stormed the community in no fewer than 40 Toyota Hilux vehicles, armed with sophisticated weapons including rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), assault rifles and explosive devices. One of the survivors narrated the ordeal, "We saw so many vehicles coming, the soldiers exchanged fire with them, but they later fled when they were overpowered. The Civilian JTF was also overpowered and we were left at the mercy of the assailants." The terrorists left devastation in their wake. They razed about 80 percent of buildings in the town and were said to have abducted 25 teenage girls.

Jonathan's reaction to the suggestion that the insurgents were better armed was swift and sharp. He threatened to pull the army out of Borno State for one month, if only to teach Shettima a lesson. "The statement from the Governor of Borno State is unfortunate. If he thinks the Nigerian army is helpless, I will

pull them out for one month and we will know whether he can still stay in government house or not”, said Jonathan.⁴⁸

It was against that acrimonious background that the Governor returned to The Villa three months later following the abduction of the Chibok girls. Shettima said he could see very clearly that the President’s mind had been poisoned by people who told him that the whole Chibok tragedy was just another political gambit to bring down his administration and on account of this, Jonathan was not prepared for any serious conversation on the challenge at hand.

Sensing that the prevailing atmosphere at the meeting would make it difficult for him to speak his mind, Shettima asked to speak with the President alone. Jonathan acceded to his request. The governor touched on what happened next, “Not only did he agree to the idea of a one-on-one meeting, President Jonathan actually held me by the hand as he led me into his office. But the moment we entered, all the others at the meeting also followed. At that point, I saw a leader who was helpless.”

Shettima was convinced that Jonathan really wanted to have a private audience with him but at the same time, he could not take his leave of the powerful aides around him. “Yet, all I wanted to do was reassure the President that the Chibok tragedy was not about him and to make suggestions on the way forward. Unfortunately, that moment was lost and from then, it was one calamity after another.”

In Nigeria and around the world, people were horrified by news of the abduction. Questions about how it was allowed to happen were compounded by a slow and inept response from the Federal Government. Coming less than ten months to the general election, it was one problem Jonathan did not need, especially as news began to filter out that he bungled the opportunity to get the girls by refusing to act immediately he was briefed.

According to an Amnesty International report which relied on testimonies gathered from local officials, the military headquarters in Maiduguri had up to four hours' advanced warning of the attack on Chibok. This much was corroborated by Hon. Yaga Yarakawa, the current Chairman of Chibok Local Government, with whom I spoke. He recalled that the day preceding the attack, there were anonymous calls to his predecessor, Mr Bana Lawan, that the insurgents were coming in large numbers.

The information was that a long convoy of gun bearing men on motorcycles was moving in the direction of Chibok, and since soldiers don't move on motorcycles, the conclusion was that it could only be Boko Haram. Their exact destination in Chibok was not known but the insurgents, said to have taken off from Kaya village, were sighted by hunters.

As they moved through Bwala Kila to Gajilam and Ping, prominent people in Chibok were already aware of their advance and were alerting the military and police authorities in Maiduguri and Abuja. The terrorists eventually descended on Chibok and the police was soon overpowered. As told by Yarakawa, it was an unequal contest, "I recall that the DPO called me that their ammunitions were exhausted and that they had to retreat. By then, the few soldiers that put up some resistance had already retreated in the face of superior firepower. What was evident was that the Boko Haram men had assessed the threats on ground before coming and were well prepared to deal with the situation."

Boko Haram practically spent the night in Chibok. But due to poor resources, the military authorities were unable to deploy reinforcements to the community on the night. It was not until the day after that soldiers came from Biu with six Toyota Hilux vehicles, according to Yarakawa. "They demanded (to know) the route. Together, with several hunters and vigilantes, the soldiers followed the route through Kaya village in Damboa Local Government where they eventually saw the dust from the fleeing Boko Haram vehicles. It was at

Kaya that the soldiers turned back because, as they said, they could not match the Boko Haram firepower.”

However, in the military’s version of events, two sets of troops were mobilized. While one set was ambushed, the other was misled by poor information before arriving Chibok after the terrorists had escaped. The situation turned ugly two days later when Defence spokesman, Major General Chris Olukolade, gave the number of girls abducted as 129, adding that all but eight of them had been rescued and were safe, a claim that was disputed by the families of the missing girls. “For the military (which) is supposed to find and rescue our children to be spreading such lies shows that they have no intention of rescuing our girls,” said Lawan Zanna, a Chibok resident whose daughter was among those taken. “It is the highest form of insult,” he added.

A day later, amidst mounting criticism, Olukolade issued another statement to the effect that his earlier report was made in good faith and not intended to deceive the public as was being interpreted. He informed that there were frantic efforts by security forces “along with vigilante groups, including hunters working to locate and free the abducted students.” He further indicated that the efforts were being “monitored at the Operation Centre of the Defence and Army Headquarters as regular progress reports are being received from troops on the ground.”

While the management of the crisis by the military had begun to put its credibility in serious doubt, the bigger problem for Jonathan came from the home front. In what she framed as a plot to discredit her husband, Dame Patience Jonathan told a group of visiting women led by the PDP National Women Leader, Mrs Kema Chikwe, “We the Nigerian women are saying that no child is missing in Borno State. If any child is missing, let the Governor go and look for them. There is nothing we can do again.” And for effect, the entire melodrama was staged before television cameras.

Holding court, the First Lady denounced the wife of Borno State Governor,

and she said the Borno authorities should be held accountable for what happened. She then launched into a monologue, “I told the Governor’s wife to call the parents of the abducted children, she did not honour it till today. The next thing I saw was women demonstrating on the streets. Now again, before Friday, my protocol (officer) called her and she gave 100 percent assurance that she will be here on Friday.

“Now again, she is not here. Because she is the mother of Borno, she is the mother of those children and I am the grandmother. She should feel more concerned. But she is not. I and the Nigerian women are calling her, but she is not here. It is left for you. If you tell me you are not pained, why should I cry more than the bereaved? If I do so, the world will ask me questions.

“You people are playing games. This thing will not help us. After today, if these Borno people say we should not help them, you Nigerian women should not go out to demonstrate because they are playing games. You can keep it in Borno and let it end there. The Police came with their own (people); the Army came with their own; WAEC came with all their own (people) but the Borno government came with a few. No parent is here to tell us that a child is missing. They cannot produce a parent whose child is missing..”

The tirade climaxed in a bizarre mix of self-pity and contrition that had Mrs Jonathan dabbing at her tears while uttering the infamous refrain that immediately went viral, “You want to kill my husband; you want to make me a widow before you go and rest. My God will never make me a widow. *Diaris God o! Diaris God o!*” Apart from the Dame’s mangled attestation to the existence of God, she also widened the lexicon with a phrase that became an instant sensation, “*Na only you waka come?*”

Less than 24 hours after Mrs Jonathan’s theatrics, Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, released a video claiming responsibility for the abduction of the girls. With a maniacal grin, Shekau said to the camera, “I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by Allah. God instructed me to sell them,

they are his properties and I will carry out his instructions. I will marry off a woman at the age of 12. I will marry off a girl at the age of nine. I said Western education should end. Girls, you should go and get married.”

In this ‘stranger-than-fiction’ situation, the opposition didn’t have to do much to shape the narrative against the Jonathan administration. “Apparently, the First Lady believed, as she revealed on public television and as it has been insinuated in certain quarters, that the girls’ abduction was a ruse aimed at embarrassing her husband, hence, neither she nor her husband took the whole tragedy seriously. That explained their delay in acting” said the APC spokesman, Lai Mohammed. “Now that the Boko Haram terrorists have claimed responsibility for the abduction and even threatened to sell the girls, the nation hopes that the First Lady and her husband now believe this is no politics,” he added.

Warning that melodrama highlighted by the shedding of made-for-television tears would not bring back the girls to their parents, Mohammed cautioned that, by usurping the President’s constitutional role, Dame Patience Jonathan was making her husband look weak and ineffective in conducting the affairs of state, and also making Nigeria the butt of jokes in the international community. “The First Lady has summoned the Borno State Police Commissioner, the Divisional Police Officer for Chibok, the Borno State Commissioner for Education, the relevant local government chairman, the school principal and the school gate man, among others. Where did she derive the authority or power to issue such summons? Does she know the implication of forcing security officials to divulge, on public television, sensitive information that could even hamper the search for the girls?” Mohammed queried.

Meanwhile, an Abuja Lawyer, Mr Ibrahim Abdullahi started a twitter hashtag, #BringBackOurGirls which quickly morphed into an activist organization named BBOG for short. Founded by Hadiza Bala Usman, Maryam Uwais, Oby Ezekwesili and Aisha Yesufu, BBOG became the *defacto* pressure

group spearheading protests advocating for the release of the Chibok girls. The group helped to fuel global condemnation of the mismanagement of the tragedy, with the United States First Lady, Mrs Michelle Obama lending her support on social media, using the BBOG hashtag with prayers for the girls and their families.

Very savvy in the art of propaganda, the opposition that had successfully leveraged social media platforms, wasted no time in using the Boko Haram crisis to constantly flog the Jonathan administration. That it took almost three weeks after the abduction of the Chibok girls before Jonathan established a fact-finding committee to look into the circumstances surrounding the incident also did not escape the attention of many Nigerians.

However, for a committee that sat for two months, nothing was ever said officially about its outcome lending credence to the speculation that the Federal Government may have been displeased with the report because it contradicted its pre-determined expectations. At the time, many people close to Jonathan were sceptical about the abduction of the Chibok girls, which they believed to be a carefully orchestrated political propaganda against the President.

Jonathan paid a heavy price for his barely concealed irritation whenever he was asked about the Chibok girls, and for not engaging BBOG, the group that had been holding a peaceful sit-out since 30th April 2014 to demand for the rescue of the abducted girls. They were determined to remain at the Unity Fountain in Abuja as a reminder that the girls were still in captivity. The activities of the group attracted worldwide attention to the plight of the abducted girls and compelled a unique humanitarian solidarity that was unprecedented in our nation's history.

Presidents, first ladies, film stars, sportsmen and women, governments and international organisations, religious leaders as well as many ordinary people around the globe joined the campaign for the release of the Chibok girls. The

publicity came with greater scrutiny of the Nigerian government's handling of the issue. Critical weaknesses and lapses in the Federal Government's rescue effort were exposed in a manner that put the administration on the defensive. The damage to Jonathan's credibility was incalculable.

In Nigeria, protesters marched to the National Assembly premises, demanding affirmative government response. Unfortunately for the Jonathan administration, the agitation was coming at a period when global attention was focused on the country, then hosting the World Economic Forum (WEF) for the first time; an event that was overshadowed by the gloom of Boko Haram terror. The focus of all the international media at WEF was therefore centred on the abducted girls and what the Nigerian authorities were doing (or not doing) to secure their release. Expressing her outrage at the mass abduction, former US Secretary of State, Mrs Hillary Clinton, said it was an act of terrorism that merited "the fullest response possible, first and foremost from the government of Nigeria."

Across the world, men and women marched on Nigerian embassies demanding action from the government, thus putting enormous pressure on Jonathan. What the government had been treating as a local political affair had gone global and become one of the biggest international news stories of 2014. The opposition continued to assail the President with accusations of incompetence, poor leadership and lack of compassion. The narrative in the public domain was that Jonathan was not seriously addressing the insurgency.

The Federal Government repeatedly defended itself, saying that efforts to rescue the girls were on course and that they would be brought back home soon. Nigerians were also told several times that the whereabouts of the girls were known, but that the government was wary of using military force, to avoid fatalities. At one point, Mr Steve Davis, an Australian negotiator believed to have been engaged by the Federal Government, came out to make grave allegations about some abortive attempts to rescue the girls.

A month after the abduction of the girls, President Francois Hollande of France hosted in Paris Presidents Paul Biya of Cameroon, Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger Republic, Boni Yayi of Benin and Idriss Derby of Chad – all French-speaking countries that share borders with Nigeria. The meeting was at the instance of Jonathan, but also invited were representatives from the European Union, United States and the United Kingdom, all in a bid to find solution to the Boko Haram insurgency. “They (Boko Haram) have threatened civilians, they have attacked schools and they have kidnapped citizens of many countries,” said Hollande who added, “France in particular has been a victim. When more than 200 young girls are being held in barbaric conditions with the prospect of being sold into slavery, there are no questions to be asked, only actions to be taken”.

While the leaders made new commitments, the United States officials who were helping in surveillance and intelligence gathering complained aloud about the equipment on the ground and the slow response to emergency by the Nigerian military in a manner that only suggested that the Jonathan administration was not doing the right things. “As committed as the United States is to supporting Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram and in returning these girls safely to their families, we cannot ignore that Nigeria can be an extremely challenging partner to work with,” said Alice Friend, US Defence Department Principal Director for African Affairs. “In general, Nigeria has failed to mount an effective campaign against Boko Haram. In the face of a new and more sophisticated threat than it has faced before, its security forces have been slow to adapt with new strategies, new doctrines and new tactics.”

About six weeks after the abduction, on Children’s Day 2014, the Chief of Defence Staff, Air Marshal Alex Badeh, assured Nigerians that the girls would be rescued. “The good news for the parents of the girls is that we know where they are,” said Badeh who was emphatic that the military was on top of the situation. “We can’t go and kill our girls in the name of trying to get them back. Nobody should come and say the Nigerian military does not know what it is

doing. We know what we are doing.”

The news was well received in Nigeria and by the visiting former British Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, in his capacity as the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education. He called Badeh’s declaration “the first ray of optimism for anxious families, many of who feared they would never see their children alive again. Until now, the only news that parents had was a photograph taken weeks ago within a few hours of their abduction.” The optimism turned out to be misplaced and the opposition was always there to taunt the Jonathan government on its inability to find the Chibok girls.

The Boko Haram-related issue started in the first year of the Jonathan’s presidency, when Borno Elders raised concerns that soldiers drafted to contain the insurgency were molesting the people. While the presidency was irked by the Elders’ intervention, there were indeed several reports, including by Amnesty International, of serious abuses and killings of innocent citizens by the military.

As the security situation in Borno State deteriorated in those early days, a Committee of Elders and Leaders of Thought appealed to the Federal Government to immediately withdraw soldiers from the streets of Maiduguri and environs. In the press statement, dated 12th July 2011, the Committee accused soldiers of the Nigerian Army of arson, murder, looting and the rape of young girls. The committee described as “grossly misplaced” the government’s calculation that the intervention of the military in the conflict would bring the situation under control.

President Jonathan gave his response at a town hall meeting with the Elders on the final day of his two-day on-the-spot assessment of Yobe and Borno, saying, “From what I gathered from the Governor of Yobe during my visit, the problem is coming down. It is coming down in Adamawa, in Gombe, in Bauchi and in Niger. But in Borno, we still have some problems. So, if you elders will not condemn it, you will continue to suffer under the terror of Boko Haram,

because without peace, we cannot develop Borno.”

The President told the Elders that the decision to withdraw soldiers from the streets of Maiduguri was entirely in their hands. “If the elders agree now to come and sign agreement with me that I should move out all the JTF, I am going to remove the JTF. When you do that today, as I am going, the JTF will start moving to their barracks. But you must give me a guarantee that if anything happens to anybody that you will be held responsible.”

In defending the military, Jonathan told his audience that he was aware of claims that in situations where for instance a soldier was killed, troops were usually deployed for a revenge mission that often killed indiscriminately. “But because of the calibre of weapons the militants are using, the police alone cannot withstand (them). And government will never sit down quietly and wait for insurgents, for some people to take up arms and take a part of this country. Never! This military people leave their families, stay on the roads and the bush so that we will sleep and I will not want to hear that one of them is killed,” vowed the President.

From then on, mutual suspicions lingered between the presidency and Borno Elders. With the abduction of the Chibok girls which gave Boko Haram the international visibility it craved, with global attention on Nigeria, the group decided to raise the stakes with audacious attacks. Unfortunately, there were series of missteps from both the military authorities and the presidency that were exploited by the opposition. For instance, a month after the abduction of the Chibok girls, Boko Haram insurgents killed 49 security operatives and civilians in two communities in Yobe and Borno states. In the attack on Buni Yadi⁴⁹, Gujba Local Government Area of Yobe State, they left 20 soldiers and 20 policemen dead while in Chinene, Gwoza LGA of Borno State, they killed nine civilians.

When it appeared Boko Haram was gaining the upper hand, the military leadership decided to establish the 7th Division of the Nigerian Army

specifically to tackle the insurgency. Major General Ahmadu Mohammed⁵⁰, a respected infantry officer at the Nigerian Army Training Centre (NATRAC) in Kontagora was deployed to head the division. A few weeks after resuming duty, he narrowly escaped death when his own soldiers opened fire on his vehicle as he came to address them at Maimalari Barracks in Maiduguri. The angry soldiers were said to be protesting the death a few days earlier of colleagues who were drafted, with inferior weapons, to face well-armed Boko Haram insurgents.

While all these developments were broadcast to the world, two events four months later, in August 2014, further compounded the growing ignominy of the military and the Jonathan administration. First, wives of Nigerian soldiers belonging to the 21 Armoured Brigade stationed at Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, protested in the early hours by locking in their husbands at home for several hours.

The women forcefully stopped military trucks by locking the exit gates of the Barracks, placing themselves as wedges before the trucks that were to drive out with their breadwinners to confront the insurgents in the newly seized town of Gwoza. “Our men are telling us that they go into battle with guns that cannot withstand that of Boko Haram,” one woman fumed. “Some of our friends are now widows and nobody is taking care of them and their children once their husbands are dead. That is why we have to lock our husbands at home to keep them alive,” another woman told reporters while vowing to “stand up and protect our husbands.”

For the military, that ugly episode was a slide into a new low. So incensed was the then Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Kenneth Minimah, that he threatened to throw the women out of the barracks. “If they repeat it, all those wives will leave the barracks,” Minimah said while addressing soldiers of the 82 Division of the Nigerian Army in Enugu. “This is not a civil service organisation. This is not a Boys’ Scout organisation. Any repeat of such act, I

will tell soldiers to use koboko (horsewhip) on the wives and bundle them out of the barracks.”

The protest was seen as an attack on the established traditions of military discipline and respect for constituted authority while the spouses might have been emboldened by the earlier act of their husbands who mutinied over welfare matters. Apart from ridiculing the nation’s military, the action was also an affront on the commander-in-chief whose ability to wage the war on terror was being questioned.

The gravity of the Boko Haram challenge was perhaps best captured by the US Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield. While speaking at the opening of a bilateral meeting between Nigeria and the United States in Abuja, Thomas-Greenfield lamented that despite collective efforts to stop Boko Haram, the situation was worsening. “The frequency and scope of Boko Haram attacks have grown more acute and constitute a serious threat to this country’s overall security,” she observed. “Boko Haram has shown that it can operate not only in the North-East, but in Kano, in Abuja and elsewhere.”

In a rare moment of introspection that could not have been helpful to the Jonathan administration, Minimah told the world that some of his men had abandoned their commission due to the fear of Boko Haram. “Sometimes, journalists ask me questions, saying soldiers are deserting their jobs because they don’t want to be killed in the North-East. I tell them yes, it is true. Our soldiers are recruited from the Nigerian society and, today, most people are not called to be soldiers, they joined because they are desperately in need of jobs,” Minimah remarked. The former Chief of Staff seemed to be saying: the Nigerian soldier is no longer what he used to be.

In the same month, August 2014, some 480 Nigerian soldiers were reported to have crossed into Cameroon during fierce fighting with Boko Haram militants. Reports claimed that the troops had joined thousands of citizens

fleeing the fighting. In an apparent damage limitation exercise, the Nigerian Defence Ministry said in a statement that the soldiers found themselves “charging through the borders in a tactical manoeuvre” after a sustained battle.

Three days later, Cameroon’s state radio announced that their President, Mr Paul Biya, had directed that the Nigerian soldiers be escorted back home, “The Head of State has instructed that the columns of Nigerian soldiers who entered Cameroonian territory should be camped in specific locations and supervised by the Cameroonian army. The Nigerian soldiers have been provided feeding, medical treatment and fuel on instructions of the Head of State. At the same time the process of accompanying the Nigerian soldiers back to their country is underway under Cameroonian military escort.” Meanwhile, Cameroonian military spokesman, Col. Didier Badjeck, told the Voice of America (VOA) that speculation in his country’s media that the incidence was a defection were unfounded, but added that they were particularly careful over the presence of the Nigerian soldiers as Boko Haram terrorists could also disguise as a regular army.

It was altogether a humiliating experience for Nigeria. But more was to come. On 27th March 2015, a day to the election in Nigeria, President Idriss Deby of Chad spoke about the 2014 botched ceasefire between the Federal Government and Boko Haram. He claimed to have warned Jonathan against holding talks with the group, suggesting that the episode was orchestrated by Boko Haram to buy time and regroup. “I told President Goodluck not to open negotiations with terrorists... but it was a political choice,” Deby told French magazine, *Le Point*, in an interview republished by AFP news agency.

The Chadian leader opined that Jonathan and the Nigerian military had underestimated Boko Haram for too long. “The whole world is asking why the Nigerian army, which is a big army, is not in a position to stand up to untrained kids armed with Kalashnikovs,” he said, seeming to state the obvious. “Two months after the start of this war, we have not had any direct contact with the

Nigerian army units on the ground. We would have hoped to have at least one Nigerian unit with us. It was even a direct request to the Nigerian government, but for reasons that escape us, up to now we have been unable to work together.”

Painting a picture of a lack of seriousness on the part of the Jonathan administration, Deby said Chad had to capture the same territories twice within Nigeria, as our military would not secure the liberated communities, thus allowing Boko Haram to return. “The Chadian army is fighting alone in its part of the Nigerian interior and that is a problem. We have had to retake certain towns twice... We are forced to abandon them and Boko Haram returns, and we have to go back. That has a human and material cost,” Deby disclosed.

Raising the stakes further, Boko Haram followed up by releasing a video claiming that it had established an Islamic state in the towns and villages it controlled in the North-East. The insurgents also seized one of Nigeria’s two main police training academies, near the captured town of Gwoza. In the 52-minute video, Shekau said Gwoza was now “part of the Islamic State”.

While many Nigerians were critical of the military, facts on the ground revealed that they also had their own challenges. An April 2009 report of the Senate Committee on Defence and Army revealed the true state of the Nigerian armed forces. Titled, “*Joint Submission on the State of Readiness of the Armed Forces and Call for Urgent Intervention*” and signed by Senator Ibrahim Ida, the 13-page report with 21 pages of annexes, painted a pathetic picture of our armed forces in terms of training, welfare and weaponry. The report provided data which revealed that the average combat efficiency of infantry and armoured corps was 43 percent, while the average combat efficiency of armoured vehicles was put at a miserable seven percent.

The report cited the example of the Jos crisis when there was an urgent need to deploy troops to quell the disturbance. “Although the required troops were

mobilized and assembled in barracks in areas close to Jos, such as Keffi and Abuja within the shortest possible time, there were no military vehicles to transport these troops to Jos. The Chief of Army Staff had to improvise by hiring ordinary goods-and-animals-carrying-trailers to convey troops to the required areas. This was so because the lift capability of the army was just 11.53 percent for 'B' vehicles (soft skin vehicle) and 7.31 percent for Armoured Vehicles. Thus, the average lift capability of the army was only 9.42 percent of requirement. Even the few available vehicles were so thinly spread all over the various divisions of the army around the country," wrote the Senate committee.

Perhaps more pathetic were the reports on the state of the Nigerian Navy platforms and facilities and the Nigerian Air Force fleets and equipment. It was therefore no surprise that fighting Boko Haram was extremely difficult. The report also revealed that, "In 2005, Government entered into a contract with a Chinese company to acquire fifteen F-7N1 aircraft (12 combat type and three trainer) at a total cost of \$251 million. About \$51 million was paid as deposit and the balance required to be paid over three years. But the commitment has not been met... despite all these ongoing efforts to improve the fleet of the Air Force, however, it cannot boast of up to 25 percent capability. Thus, its capability level is far below the acceptable level."

In trying to contain the Boko Haram insurgency by seeking for arms in any available country at a time the Americans were blocking the sales of weapons to Nigeria, it would seem that every step taken by the Jonathan administration was dogged by mistakes that were capitalized upon by the opposition, whose membership was swelling. Most damaging of all was the continuous allegation of corruption, which the opposition usually flagged up as the reason why the military authorities were losing the war, a theory that was not without justification.

In September 2014, an aircraft conveying \$9.3m cash from Abuja, allegedly

for arms purchase, was seized by the South African authorities. Two Nigerians and an Israeli aboard the airplane were immediately detained. It was a big scandal that exposed the government not only to the charge of corruption by ferrying illicit cash across the border, but also to the accusation that it had no real strategy for winning the war against Boko Haram.

However, the problem of the administration was not limited to corruption. On 17th October 2014, the Federal Government announced a ceasefire deal with Boko Haram. Initially, many Nigerians expressed elation that a solution might have been found to the problem of the insurgency at last. “Already, the terrorists have announced a ceasefire in furtherance of their desire for peace,” Mike Omeri, coordinator of the National Information Centre (set up strictly to disseminate information relating to the insurgency) said triumphantly. “In this regard, the government of Nigeria has, in similar vein, declared a ceasefire.”

Yet, the attacks by Boko Haram continued on some communities, leading to scepticism, especially from the opposition camp, about the credibility of such a deal. Aminu Wali, Minister of Foreign Affairs, assured the world that the ceasefire was intact. “Boko Haram are saying that those ones [attacks] were done by other rogues and criminals,” Wali said after a meeting with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius. With less than four months to the general election, it was a coup for the Jonathan administration, as the Boko Haram insurgency had become a serious local and international problem of terror.

Two weeks later, however, the ceasefire turned out to be another hoax, and the manner in which it came to light was very devastating for the administration. Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, who had been declared killed on three previous occasions by the military, resurfaced in yet another video wherein he poured scorn on the idea of a peace deal with the Federal Government. “We have not made ceasefire with anyone. What is our business with negotiation? We did not negotiate with anyone... It’s a lie, it’s a lie. We will not negotiate,” he said defiantly.

The confidence in the Nigerian military continually eroded as even soldiers began speaking against and lashing out at their superiors. When 54 soldiers were sentenced to death in December 2014 by a military court, one of them took to his Facebook page to say, “I am a soldier and I am sentenced to death by the Nigerian Army, (be)cause we did not go to fight Boko Haram without equipment. We ask(ed) for weapon instead (they) gave (us) death sentence.”

It took his farewell speech, following Jonathan’s electoral defeat, for Badeh to admit that the defence apparatus which he headed was under-funded and under-equipped in its fight against Boko Haram. “I was head of a military that lacked the relevant equipment and motivation to fight an enemy that was invisible and embedded with the local populace,” Badeh said in retrospect. “Over the years, the military was neglected and under-equipped to ensure the survival of certain regimes, while other regimes, based on advice from some foreign nations, deliberately reduced the size of the military and under-funded it.”

However, Badeh’s regret in his valedictory speech at his pulling-out ceremony in Abuja on 30th July 2015 was coming too late.

In the thick of the crisis, President Jonathan had sought National Assembly approval to borrow \$1billion in supply of military hardware to fight Boko Haram, a tacit admission that the military was indeed under-equipped. The National Assembly gave approval in September 2014. However, the United States blocked the sale of ammunition to Nigeria based on the allegations of human rights violations levelled at the administration by human rights groups.

All the while, Boko Haram terrorists continued to wreak havoc while gaining more grounds on Nigerian territory in the North-East. Coming on the eve of a highly competitive election, the administration was also distracted by the President’s ambitions. Political survival might have beclouded moral judgments as they hopelessly denied and deflected responsibility, blaming political enemies for stage-managing their misfortunes.

Dambazau, a former Army Chief, believed the Jonathan administration saw Boko Haram in two lights, which explained their response, “The first narrative was that the insurgency was a northern agenda to sabotage his government, while the second was that it was all part of a plot to Islamise Nigeria. Because of that, the President ignored early warnings and didn’t do much to fight the insurgency. That attitude also permeated the military hierarchy and it emboldened the insurgents. Meanwhile, the morale of the soldiers was low, aside the fact that they were not provided the necessary tools to prosecute the war.”

At a point, the administration had to double down on efforts to manage bad optics, deflate or calm the consistent protests and turn the tide of global public opinion which was forcefully against it, though it was also evident Jonathan had begun to swim against the political tide. On Boko Haram, as pressure mounted on the government, various excuses were offered. But the issue of the Chibok girls would not go away. At different points, the military claimed to know the location of the girls but could not embark on rescue efforts for fear of their safety if the mission failed. However, by this time, the Jonathan administration already had a gaping deficit of trust from the Nigerian people and protesters were not going to accept anything short of their rescue.

Perhaps what seemed to have damaged Jonathan the most was the picture of him dancing in Kano barely 24 hours after 100 people were bombed in Nyanya, a suburb of Abuja, and on the very day the Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram. The President was in Kano to receive the former governor of the state, Ibrahim Shekarau, into the PDP. With the photograph circulated widely on social media and adverts of it placed in newspapers by the opposition, many Nigerians at home and abroad questioned the judgment of the President.

This prompted the former High Commissioner of Nigeria to the United Kingdom, Dr Christopher Kolade to describe the administration as one that

was lacking in leadership. Speaking on the theme, “Centenary Leadership: Nigeria at 100 and the next 100,” Kolade condemned radio and television jingles comparing President Jonathan with great world leaders like Lee Kuan Yew, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr.

Kolade said he was shocked to watch on television how some politicians were telling Nigerians that they had never had it as good as it was under Jonathan. “I am in my eighties and I can tell you that Nigeria has had it much better than now. They even said ‘Keep doing the good works because we who are with you are much more than those who are against you’. Tell me something, is that part of Nollywood? Let me cite one example. If 59 boys are killed in Yobe State and you as a leader, the next day went to Kano State and danced in a political rally, then I say, that is not leadership. It can’t be. If some suicide bombers bombed a place and you as a leader [have a] political rally the next day, the least you can do is to postpone the programme,” Kolade said.

In the weeks and days leading up to the March 2015 presidential elections, that was the kind of message the opposition helped in no small measure to amplify, by selling to the public the picture of an unfit, uncaring, and inept incumbent president. And not a few Nigerians were taking note.

[48](#) President Jonathan made the threat while fielding questions in the course of the presidential media chat on 25th January 2014.

[49](#) Also the location of one of Boko Haram’s worst atrocities, the slaughter of 59 boys at Government College Buni Yadi on 25th February 2014, two months before the abduction of the Chibok girls.

[50](#) He was retired following the mutiny against him, but was reinstated by the Buhari administration in January 2016 on account of a letter he wrote that his retirement did not follow due process.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INTRIGUES WITHIN APC

On the 8th of December 2014, the APC Governors arrived Lagos to participate in the process that would lead to the emergence of their presidential candidate for the 2015 general elections. There was already a consensus that Buhari would pick the presidential ticket, but the issue of his running mate was still very contentious. Buhari had told a few of them that he had a long-standing commitment to Tinubu that they would run together. This did not go down well with many stakeholders within the party.

While a few of these people may have had their personal issues with the former Lagos State Governor, the main argument was that such a pairing, especially with Buhari, was a recipe for failure at the poll, many reasoned. Of course, Tinubu's calculation was that religion would not matter in the South-West where almost every family has adherents of both religions, but the APC leaders were not ready to risk the election on that rather tenuous argument.

With the former Kwara State governor, Senator Bukola Saraki leading the charge, APC governors and senators agreed to meet with Tinubu to convince him that a Muslim-Muslim ticket would not work. At the meeting, Tinubu was non-committal, insisting that the issue of running mate should be discussed only after the primaries. To him, it was more important that the governors work to ensure the emergence of Buhari rather than dissipate energy on who would become the running mate.

Apparently unsatisfied, Senator Saraki as well as Governors Wamakko of Sokoto and Abdul'aziz Yari of Zamfara decided to meet Buhari, especially when they had feelers that he could announce Tinubu's name as running mate the moment he was declared the winner of the primaries, thus bringing about

another *fait accompli*.

The governors did a concise analysis of the situation for Buhari at the meeting. Each one told him about the Christian population in their states and how a Muslim-Muslim ticket would be perceived. They added that with such a ticket, it would be difficult to sell Buhari to get many votes from the North-Central, a geo-political zone that was then at play. The governors also stated that for the party to win, the running mate had to come from the South-West. Similar to Tinubu, Buhari made no commitment to them, but the governors were confident that they had driven the message home. But the former military Head of State had come a long way and he was not prepared to gamble away what appeared to be his best shot at the presidency after his previous disappointments.

While Buhari contested the 2003 and 2007 presidential elections under the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), he was never in control of the party or its processes. The idea for the formation of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), according to Galadima, the founding National Secretary, started after the 2007 presidential election when Buhari established a committee under the leadership of Senator Rufai Hanga to examine three options: one, to remain within the ANPP under which platform he contested the election; two, leave the party to join another of the then existing parties; three, form a completely new party.

An overwhelming majority opted for the formation of a new party, said Galadima. What reinforced that position was the fact that the ANPP leadership at the time was hobnobbing with the government of President Yar'Adua of the PDP. The party leaders had negotiated for some positions which, when given, they ceded to members of their families. It was against that background that most of the people around Buhari felt that the best way out was to form their own political party on the platform of which he ran against Jonathan in 2011.

At the grand finale of the CPC campaign in Abuja in April 2011, Buhari

described his candidacy as “the third and last one for me, since after it I will not present myself again for election into the Office of the President.” The import of that statement was that, regardless of the outcome, Buhari was not going to run for office again. His campaigns were restricted mostly to the North, while the calculation of his handlers was that he would win popular votes without the spread (and the constitutionally mandatory 25 percent in no fewer than 24 of the 36 states), thus pushing the election into a run-off in which only a simple majority would suffice for a winner to emerge.

When the election held, Buhari lost and almost immediately the result was announced, violence broke out in no fewer than 12 northern states. Although the exact numbers of casualties remain unknown, they were believed to be in the hundreds, and among them were ten National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members who had been deployed for the elections. The first statement from the CPC described the killings as “the by-product of the determination to win elections by incumbents by any means, which has always characterised such actions by historical antecedence.”

Without sparing any thoughts for the victims, including innocent bystanders who were killed either as a result of their ethnicity or the religion they professed, the CPC Legal Adviser, Abubakar Malami⁵¹, who signed the statement, said, “The determination to win elections by incumbents by any means has always given birth to spontaneous reactions in the form of breakdown of law and order.” He recalled “the anger of the people of the Western Region in 1965 and the people of Ondo State in 1983 against the use of federal might to dislodge opposition governments in the South-West in favour of the ruling parties at the federal level with concocted results.”

In a swift reaction, the presidency described as vexatious “the attempt by the CPC to justify the unfortunate carnage and bloodletting,” saying it amounted to “rubbing salt on the raw wounds of families who lost dear ones, and those who were maimed and lost valuable property to the carnage. It also amounts to

an open admission that the party's supporters were indeed behind the violence, and that the party may well have planned it all."

According to Jonathan's spokesman, Ima Niboro, "Malami went ahead to insult the sensibilities of Nigerians by drawing rather disingenuous parallels between these obviously orchestrated riots and the Western region crisis of the First Republic." What Malami failed to explain to Nigerians, according to Niboro, "was why these riots and killings happened largely in areas where the CPC won and Jonathan lost. He also failed to state that the pattern of voting during the presidential elections in those areas practically replicated the National Assembly elections. But while the CPC hailed the one as free, fair and transparent, it has condemned the other as fraudulent and rigged."

A year later, Buhari became the first aspirant to publicly declare his interest in the 2015 presidential election, putting an end to speculation about his retirement from active politics. The former military leader, who had contested in the presidential elections in 2003, 2007 and 2011 and came second on each occasion, addressed his supporters in Abuja to declare he had changed his mind about not running again. By then, he had been persuaded that he should give it another try at a time he and Tinubu had started exploratory talks about the proposed merger between the CPC and the ACN.

In explaining the rationale for his decision to run for the presidency a fourth time, Buhari attributed it to pressure from his supporters. "When I was going to contest election last year (2011), I said that after the elections, I would not submit myself to election in 2015, but then also said I would remain a party man but would not vie for posts. However, since then, it has been like hell was let loose... members of my party, associates, individually and as groups, put pressure on me. There is a certain group of party members who asked me whether I will rescind my decision. I told them it was up to the party. They clapped and said I must run. I have withdrawn my decision not to run," he affirmed.

From that point, Buhari decided to take firmer control of the CPC either by installing loyalists or going above party officials in nominating people for specific assignments within the CPC. Galadima, who had by then fallen out with Buhari, always countered these moves, believing that the retired general preferred to deal with people who pledged personal loyalty to him. “He has no temperament for anybody who would not kowtow to him even if you are adding value; he would rather those who would treat him like a god. That is why Nigeria is where it is today,” said Galadima, who contends that Buhari has learnt very little in politics as he “remains a fully certified dictator.”

To Galadima, the CPC could not successfully conclude the merger with ACN before the 2011 presidential election essentially because of Buhari’s temperament. The former ally accused Buhari of sowing the seed of division within the party by practically unilaterally handpicking the gubernatorial candidates in the core northern states. “By then, he had been captured by what I will call The Kaduna Group, comprising Mamman Daura⁵², Mahmoud Tukur and Musa Bello. They were the people who brought in Col. Hameed Ali (rtd) to be his Chief of Staff even though he was soon to turn against them,” Galadima theorised.

The Governor of Katsina State, Alhaji Aminu Bello Masari⁵³, who remains a Buhari loyalist, has a contrary view as to the disposition of the President to both the merger process and the running of the CPC. To Masari’s mind, Buhari did everything to ensure the success of the merger and “the fact that he lost the presidential (2011) election cannot be seen as an indication that his choice of running mate was the problem.”

Masari argued that the lessons learnt from the experience eventually became useful, such that for the first time in the history of elections in Nigeria, a formidable opposition coalition was not only built, it succeeded in wresting power from an incumbent president. Praising Buhari and Tinubu, Masari traced the foundation of the merger to specific lessons they learnt from 2011. Noting

that Buhari, who ran on the platform of a political party built less than ten months to the poll, was able to garner over 12 million votes, Masari elucidated, “We are talking of a party that had no money, no real structure and had to contend with federal might as well as the PDP structures in all the 36 states. We knew these were genuine votes for the person of Buhari.”

On the rationale for building the opposition coalition around Buhari, Masari explained that it was clear to practically everybody within the CPC and the ACN that the only person that could defeat an incumbent president with all the machinery and resources of state at his disposal was Buhari – essentially because he had die-hard supporters who were willing to vote and defend those votes, even with their lives. “In our reasoning, and we turned out to be right, we believed that with any other candidate, we would either lose the election or be rigged out without much consequences.”

On Buhari and democratic temperament, Masari submitted that there could be no better demonstration of that than the manner in which the merger was consummated. “I recollect that when ANPP wanted to join, Buhari had no objection despite the way the party leaders had treated him in the past, and when a faction of APGA led by Rochas Okorocha also showed interest, they were quickly accommodated by both Buhari and Tinubu who were driving the process.”

The moment Buhari and Tinubu were ready to work together in forging a political partnership, the rest was easy, according to Masari. He also defended Buhari against the charge of dictatorship, saying the President did what he needed to do by using the right people, otherwise the efforts would have come to naught. “There were people within the CPC who believed the merger would not work so they are now disappointed. There was also another group who felt sidelined, because they were under the impression that without them nothing would work. Since they turned out to be wrong, they are now aloof,” concluded Masari.

By December 2014, Buhari still had to face a competitive presidential primaries process to determine the flagbearer of the APC. At the end of the exercise, he defeated four other aspirants by polling 3,430 votes at the party's national convention held at the Teslim Balogun Stadium in Lagos. Governor Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso of Kano State who came second got 974 votes, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar scored 954 votes while Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State scored 624 votes. The publisher of Leadership Newspapers, Mr Sam Nda-Isaiah, got 10 votes. 16 votes were considered invalid and were therefore voided⁵⁴.

The jostling for the post of running mate moved to Abuja once the primaries were concluded. While the names of Governors Rotimi Amaechi and Adams Oshiomhole were also being touted, many within the party hierarchy had decided that the position should go to the South-West. In consulting on the issue, Buhari visited Atiku at his Abuja home on Sunday 14th December. The former number two man pledged his support to Buhari but warned against picking a Muslim running mate, as that could jeopardize the aspiration of the party.

On Monday 15th December 2014, Buhari called on Tinubu at his Asokoro residence in Abuja. It was not a pleasant meeting, according to those present. The APC presidential candidate explained why he could not go with a Muslim-Muslim ticket. But Tinubu countered that the position was forced on Buhari by his opponents within the coalition who were using religion as an excuse to edge him (Tinubu) out.

Buhari persisted and asked Tinubu to nominate three persons. The South-West leader sent only one name: that of his former Attorney General and Commissioner of Justice, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo. In a statement issued after the choice of Osinbajo had been made public, Tinubu hinted at the opposition to him running as Buhari's VP as originally offered. "Despite all the noise and opposition around my possible selection, [Buhari] stood firm and steadfast; he

showed the traits of a leader in holding to a decision he believed was right despite the errant plots against it.”

Without mentioning names, Tinubu went further to narrate how those opposed to him as the presidential running mate orchestrated a campaign to achieve their aim. He wrote, “When my name was raised, the political hatchet men tried to chop it down with rumour and lies. Over the years, I have developed a thick skin. The personal attacks did not bother me. I am used to them. While I have a thick skin, I don’t have a thick mind. There has been one form of attack that has troubled me. That is the attack based on religion. Those who exploit religion should be wary. For there really is a God and He does not like it when you play with His people or use His name to do the opposite of what He intends.”

With that statement, a curtain was drawn on a long-running drama that started right from the formation of the APC.

It was Fani-Kayode⁵⁵, then a member of the party, who first sent a warning shot, saying, “The biggest mistake that the APC can make is to field a Muslim/Muslim ticket for the 2015 presidential elections. Such a mistake would spell the death-knell of the party and would provide the platform for a sure victory for Goodluck Jonathan and the PDP. We must endeavour never to make such a mistake.”

While Fani-Kayode mentioned no name, former Foreign Affairs Minister, Chief Tom Ikimi⁵⁶, was more direct, following his inability to clinch the APC chairmanship in April 2014. He attributed his defeat by John Odigie Oyeogun to a sleight of hand by Tinubu, whom he accused of scheming to be running mate on a ticket that had a Muslim from the North as presidential candidate, a dream Ikimi would not support. “Asiwaju Bola Tinubu may recall that mostly for the same reasons, I opposed his desire to run as vice presidential candidate to Alhaji Atiku Abubakar under the AC (Action Congress) banner in 2007. We

settled for Senator Ben Obi from Eastern Nigeria. I know he nurses a grudge against me for the position I took which was strongly supported by leaders from five zones apart from the South-West. I have no regrets whatsoever for my courage to stand up against oppression or dictatorship,” Ikimi said.

In the build up to the APC presidential primaries, several forces within and outside the APC were unrelenting in a vicious media campaign against Tinubu’s aspiration to be running mate to Buhari who, many believed, would secure the party’s presidential ticket. The PDP was not left out of the campaign as the party had consistently used religion to knock the APC and its leadership. While the South-West wing of the APC, led by Chief Bisi Akande, kept saying religion would not matter, other stakeholders were not prepared to accept such a pairing and many made their voices heard. Those who did not want to offend Tinubu made sure their surrogates kept the issue alive in the media.

In an apparent bid to fight back and possibly deflect the attention, the Tinubu Media Office issued a statement accusing the Jonathan administration of running a smear campaign against him on the basis of religion. “The successful merger and birth of the APC posed the most potent threat to the PDP and Tinubu, an architect of the merger, has become a marked man,” the statement said. “The thought of a Buhari-Tinubu ticket confounds the PDP hierarchy and their crisis-battered President. That Tinubu might be nominated as General Buhari’s running mate also incenses the small element within the APC who joined the party not for its progressive vision, but to exploit its platform to press forward their vision of themselves. Having failed at halting General Buhari’s bid, the PDP disinformation machine has thrown itself into overdrive trying to stymie the selection of Tinubu. Sadly, some elements within the APC – elevating their personal ambition over party and national interests – have lent themselves to this endeavour.”

Hinting that the choice of Tinubu as running mate to Buhari was on the cards, the statement concluded, “They seek to prevent a person who may be

controversial yet he is perhaps Nigeria's most capable and versatile politician, strategist and policy maker. For perhaps the most gifted politician of his time not to seek national office is a luxury a nation in this dire circumstance can ill afford. In the end, governance has little to do with religion, region or rumour. It has to do with vision and competence. The wrong knives will never be able to cut that truth.”⁵⁷

Tinubu reflected on that episode when I sat down with him at his Lagos office in December 2016, insisting that the campaign against him was orchestrated from both within and outside his party, though the one that pained him most was from within. “What they (Saraki and others from PDP) did behind my back was wrong. We always do things as a group. By the time they joined, we were already too far ahead in our processes but we accommodated them. We agreed to take their state structures and subsume them into the party and they all had the opportunity to nominate the candidates of their choices for different political offices. But they went behind to be instigating Buhari and some other people in the party against me on the pretext of religion. That was not right. They were canvassing arguments that the Christians in the North would not vote for a Muslim-Muslim ticket. Nasir El-Rufai was also selling the same argument within the CPC because at that point, he still wanted to have Pastor Bakare brought in as Buhari's running mate.”

Tinubu confirmed that some PDP decampers governors and senators came to him on the eve of the primaries to ask whether it was true that he had a deal with Buhari to run together, but he felt the timing and their motive were wrong. “I told them that it was better to resolve such issue after the primaries but they wanted to make it a condition for supporting Buhari which for me was very wrong. I told them I could not insist on this as a condition for my support for Buhari. I felt that was not right to hold Buhari hostage in this manner. We thus canvassed hard for Buhari and threw our support behind him for the primaries. I believe the support that we gave was fundamental to Buhari clinching the

party nomination. Without that support, a different outcome would have been most likely,” Tinubu recalled.

He did not elaborate on the two other options that he said were also on the cards: Kwankwaso (then Governor of Kano State) and Atiku Abubakar (former Vice President), in that order. There were those who felt that the Kwankwaso, being younger, would make a better choice. As for Atiku, even though he was perhaps the most prepared for the job, there were many within the party who were not so keen on him. Tinubu offered more insight, “After the primaries, there were series of meetings, with leaders like Chief Akande insisting that I should be the VP choice. Others, for their own personal reasons, were saying I should not be the person, claiming a Muslim-Muslim ticket would not be accepted at a certain point.”

When it became clear that the opposition to him as running mate was too strong, Tinubu ruled himself out by releasing a public statement; but when Buhari asked him for three names, he insisted on submitting only one. “I told him that I would give him only one name that would not be mine, although I personally believed a Muslim-Muslim ticket could ensure victory. I backed out because I did not want to be depicted as causing a problem. I did not want foes inside and outside the party to use my name as a reason to sow division. I backed away from the position in order to offer Buhari a name I once raised with him in 2011: that of Professor Yemi Osinbajo”, the former Lagos governor emphasised.

Tinubu disclosed that when the call was made to Osinbajo to intimate him, “he was a bit hesitant as he asked me to go and tell Pastor Adeboye⁵⁸. I replied by telling him that he needed to inform Pastor Adeboye himself, after all, there had been times when if we needed to see Pastor Adeboye, he was the one who facilitated it. I reminded him that since the final choice was not for me to make; I should not go to Pastor Adeboye until after the announcement of his name. So, Osinbajo went to meet Pastor Adeboye who reportedly told him, ‘If

they offer you, take it’.”

However, that was just the beginning of the drama because there was no certainty about whether or not Buhari would make the choice. “In fact, there were indications that others were trying to steer Buhari in another direction that would repeat what happened in 2011. Acting contrary to the spirit of a harmonious union, these people believed that we would have no choice but to accept whatever came since the parties had already merged.”

Tinubu faulted hardliner members of the former CPC who “seemed to be advancing the names of Pastor Bakare and Mr Rotimi Akeredolu⁵⁹. Pastor Bakare I could understand but how Akeredolu became a nominee from their side was shocking to me. I was later to find out that his connection to certain CPC figures predated his overture to me to become the ACN candidate in the Ondo State Governorship Election in 2012.”

Having resolved that he had to make his position very clear to the CPC leaders who were close enough to Buhari to deliver his message, Tinubu told me, “I let it be known to some of the CPC people, ‘This is not a closed deal. Anything can still go wrong, so please don’t assume that you can just pick anybody as presidential running mate and we will support the partnership. No, if Osinbajo is dropped for someone else, all bets are off’. I made that very clear.”

The high-wire act also left Tinubu with no option than to be on his guard. As he admitted to me, “Once bitten, twice shy they say. That explains why I did not attend the press conference. I did not want to be taken by surprise a second time in case another name other than the one I submitted was announced.”

In the end, Osinbajo’s name was announced by Buhari as the presidential running mate.

⁵¹ Malami is currently the Attorney General of the Federation and Justice

Minister under the Buhari administration.

- [52](#) President Buhari's cousin who is credited with enormous influence and generally seen as the go-to man under his government in the past (as a military leader) and now as a civilian president.
- [53](#) Masari, the current Governor of Katsina State, was Speaker of the House of Representatives between 2003 and 2007.
- [54](#) The primaries were conducted by a team led by the former Ekiti State Governor and current Solid Minerals Minister, Dr Kayode Fayemi.
- [55](#) Fani-Kayode, former Aviation Minister, was later to dump the APC to become the Media Director for the Jonathan Presidential Campaign Organisation.
- [56](#) Ikimi, National Chairman of the defunct National Republic Convention (NRC) during the military-midwifed abortive Third Republic was the National Chairman of the APC at formation who was eventually edged out for Chief John Odigie Oyeogun when the party had its first convention.
- [57](#) Statement released by the Tinubu Media Office on 16th December 2014.
- [58](#) Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye is the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) where Osinbajo is also a pastor.
- [59](#) Akeredolu, SAN, was the ACN candidate for the 2012 gubernatorial election in Ondo State, having secured the ticket through Tinubu's sleight of hand at a time the duo were friends and associates. At the 2016 APC gubernatorial primaries, Tinubu backed somebody else but Akeredolu won in controversial circumstances. He is currently the governor of Ondo State.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE OBASANJO REVOLT

Prior to leaving Abuja for his Ogun State campaign in January 2015, President Jonathan had firmed up his plans to visit former President Olusegun Obasanjo, from whom he had become estranged. Third parties who broached the idea had assured Jonathan that the meeting would hold. But in agreeing to the idea, Obasanjo had given one condition: Jonathan must bring along a witness and the person should be someone of sufficient credibility.

With that proviso accepted, Jonathan approached the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye who agreed to bear witness at the meeting. But on the evening of 12th January 2015 when the session held at the Hilltop residence of the former President in Abeokuta, Adeboye also brought along Bishop David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel. “It was only Pastor Adeboye that Jonathan told me was coming with him but Bishop Oyedepo is a man I also know very well so I had no problem with his presence at the meeting,” Obasanjo began, as he shared with me his frustrations with the man he helped to power.

The session that followed was definitely not a pleasant one for Jonathan. “I told him in the presence of his witnesses that I was not going to support him for a second-term and I gave my reasons,” Obasanjo pronounced as we sat down to breakfast at his Abeokuta residence in December 2016. “Aside the issue of zoning on which he was reneging, his stewardship up to that point had also shown very clearly that he was not up to the job.”

Obasanjo’s role in the ascension of Jonathan to the presidency is already well-documented. But he was also for almost three years, between 2012 and 2015, one of the fiercest critics of the administration and was helpful to the

efforts of the opposition to unseat Jonathan. For instance, when seven PDP Governors caused an uproar by staging a walk-out at the party convention before five of the rebels eventually joined the opposition, Obasanjo was the one who gave them the strongest support, according to Babangida Aliyu.

The initial aim of the group was not to leave PDP. Aliyu unpacked the dynamics for me, “We just wanted to act like a pressure group from within. We wanted a situation where Jonathan would be persuaded not to run in 2015 knowing that the zoning issue would present a challenge for the party, even if he succeeded in railroading himself into becoming the PDP presidential candidate.”

Seeking out former leaders, the so-called PDP G7 met with the Second Republic President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari as well as Chief Ernest Shonekan. “We wanted to meet Dr Alex Ekwueme but he was not in the country. We met General Abdulsalami Abubakar. We met General Ibrahim Babangida. We met General T.Y. Danjuma. But aside President Obasanjo and General Danjuma who were very forthright with us and never minced words in our engagements with them, most of the other leaders we met were still hedging their bets,” Aliyu recalled.

For his part, Obasanjo explained that he had nothing personal against Jonathan and that the disagreement between them was based on certain principles on which he was not prepared to compromise. “My decision was based on what would be for the good of Nigeria and since I didn’t consider Jonathan good enough, I told him to his face. What would I be afraid of?” Coming just about a month to the presidential election prior to its postponement, it was a distraught Jonathan that left the Abeokuta meeting. But as Obasanjo told me, Jonathan left him with no other choice.

Even though Obasanjo was instrumental to Jonathan’s meteoric rise to power – first as Vice President, and later as President, following the death of Yar’Adua – it did not take long for the duo to fall apart. In fact, less than a year

into the Jonathan administration, Obasanjo had served notice that he was not going to be involved with the government, and on 3rd April 2012, he resigned his position as Chairman of the PDP Board of Trustees.

Two months later on 15th June, Obasanjo made known his view that the Jonathan administration lacked the will and consistency to fight corruption. He spoke during a debate organised by the Club de Madrid (an independent, non-profit organization comprising 80 former democratic Presidents and Prime Ministers from 56 countries) on 'Meeting Sustainable Societies and Social Justice' at the 100th Session of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, Switzerland.

Asked by moderator, Ritula Shah of the BBC, if there was political will to fight corruption in Nigeria, Obasanjo was unequivocal, "I haven't seen that will of persistency and consistency in Nigeria because the people that are involved in corruption, they are strongly entrenched and unless you are ready to confront them at the point of even giving your life for it, then you will give in and when you give in, that is the end of it."

It was a devastating blow for Jonathan. But it would take a year for Obasanjo to go public on his assessment of the Jonathan administration on the issue of corruption. "This morning, on my way from Abeokuta by road, I was listening to the radio. I heard that [the Jonathan administration] said that they are going to set up an agency for pipeline protection. Now, what are the police there for? What are all the security agencies doing? This is another *chop-chop*," said the former president at an Abuja thanksgiving ceremony to mark the 50th birthday of Dr Oby Ezekwesili⁶⁰.

Detailing how he came to the conclusion that the Jonathan administration did not take accountability seriously, Obasanjo said it was the management of the Boko Haram insurgency that riled him the most, and led him to conclude that a continuation of the administration could endanger the country. "Jonathan and his people turned Boko Haram into an industry for making money. Rather

than seek for solution, Boko Haram became an ATM machine for taking money out of the treasury. Take the issue of the Chibok tragedy. If he had acted within the first 48 hours, they would have found most of the girls. The CAN⁶¹ Chairman of the local chapter in Chibok was here to see me and he explained how they were helpless with no reaction from the authorities for several days,” the former President revealed.

Incidentally, Obasanjo had warned early in the life of the administration that Jonathan needed to pay more attention to the challenge of Boko Haram, an admonition he said went unheeded. In November 2012, at a ceremony in honour of the then President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, who was marking his 40th anniversary in the ministry, Obasanjo had hinted that the administration was compounding the Boko Haram challenge. “My fear is that when you have a sore and you don’t attend to it early enough, it festers and becomes very bad. Don’t leave a problem that can be bad unattended...if you say you don’t want a strong leader who can have all the characteristics of a leader, including the fear of God, then you have a weak leader and the rest of the problem is yours,” he said at the occasion.

Apart from what he perceived as a lack of capacity and weakness of character, Obasanjo accused Jonathan of promoting a sickening form of Ijaw triumphalism that was unhelpful for him and the nation. “I once asked him, ‘What is this Ijaw thing all about? Can the Ijaw people make you president?’ I remember when he granted pardon to Alamiyeseigha and it became an international embarrassment, I also asked him, ‘Why did you do it?’ He started by offering the lame excuse that it was a Council of State decision before I reminded him that Council of State was merely advisory and that the decision was his. After a while, he said if I was at the meeting he probably could have acted differently because nobody opposed it. I then counselled him on what he could do to address the problem but either because he didn’t have the courage to broach the issue with Alamiyeseigha or he didn’t think it was important, he

did nothing afterwards,” said Obasanjo.

Indeed, the way some Ijaw men like ex-militant, Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, and a former Federal Commissioner for Information, Edwin Clark, were carrying on at the time was a problem for Jonathan. That he never called them to order created the impression that he supported what they were saying and doing, even though he also explained his position to me. For instance, in May 2013, Dokubo-Asari said Niger Delta militants would take up arms and throw the country into chaos if Jonathan was not re-elected for a second-term in 2015. Again, on 9th September 2013, he declared that Jonathan’s presidential ambition in 2015 was already settled. “The way things are going, there is no sitting on the fence in the battle before us... All of us will have to be in the ring and fight. 2015 is already a settled matter. Goodluck Jonathan would be President in 2015,” Dokubo-Asari declared.

Just a few days later, Edwin Clark repeated the same declaration that Jonathan would remain President in 2015 election because, according to him, it was not yet the turn of the North. “In the constitution of Nigeria, every president has two elections to be contested. (Alhaji Shehu) Shagari did it in 1979 and 1983. In 1999, (Chief Olusegun) Obasanjo did it and 2003. In 2007, Umaru Musa Yar’Adua of blessed memory did it and if he had remained alive he would have done it again in 2011, so Jonathan has the right to contest again,” Clark said. “There is an incumbent who has not done a second-term, so northerners have no place. It is not yet the turn of a northerner. They have the right to contest as Nigerians, yes, but in other parties”.

At the same occasion, the former Governor of Bayelsa State, Chief Dieprie Alamiyeseigha asserted, “Aso Rock is not vacant. The northern agitators will all at the appropriate time join the moving train. They may have their opinion but I can assure you that President Jonathan will remain as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, come 2015.”

At different times, Obasanjo was also on the receiving end of attacks by

prominent Ijaw leaders and groups until December 2013, when the former president decided to confront the issue head on in his open letter titled, *“Before It Is Too Late.”* He lamented that rather than take steps to advance Nigeria’s interest, Jonathan was merely pursuing selfish interests by destroying his own party, polarizing the country along regional and religious lines and ridiculing Nigeria in the comity of nations. “For you to allow yourself to be ‘possessed’, so to say, to the exclusion of most of the rest of Nigerians as an ‘Ijaw man’ is a mistake that should never have been allowed to happen”, Obasanjo wrote Jonathan. “To allow or tacitly encourage people of ‘Ijaw nation’ to throw insults on other Nigerians from other parts of the country and threaten fire and brimstone to protect your interest as an Ijaw man is myopic and your not openly quieting them is even more unfortunate.”

Obasanjo’s criticism was coming at a time when opposition to the government was already coalescing with the formation of the APC and the defection of some PDP Governors. He further put Jonathan on the spot by raising questions about his aspiration for 2015 election against the background of the “gentleman agreement” brokered in 2011. “Up till two months ago, Mr President, you told me that you have not told anybody that you would contest in 2015. I quickly pointed out to you that the signs and the measures on the ground do not tally with your statement. You said the same to one other person who shared his observation with me. And only a fool would believe that statement you made to me judging by what is going on. I must say it is not ingenious. You may wish to pursue a more credible and more honourable path.”

Cutting to the chase, Obasanjo said Jonathan told him before the 2011 election that he would not seek a second-term, and made the same promise to governors, party stakeholders and Nigerians. Arguing that it would be “morally flawed” for Jonathan to contest in 2015. He wrote further, “As a leader, two things you must cherish and hold dear among others are trust and honour, both of which are important ingredients of character. I will want to see anyone in the Office of the Presidency of Nigeria as a man or woman who can be trusted,

a person of honour in his words and character.”

As one of the people who negotiated the compromise by which Jonathan contested in 2011, Obasanjo said there was no way he would endorse his (Jonathan) reneging on the initial agreement. “I confronted him several times but he kept deceiving himself and when I could no longer put up with it, I had to register my opposition to the idea on record as I did in my letter to him,” Obasanjo told me.

With Jonathan sending his response to Obasanjo by letting loose his attack dogs in the media against the former president, it became clear that battle lines had been drawn. Addressing writers and literary enthusiasts at the Aké Arts and Book Festival in Abeokuta, the former President was asked to rate Jonathan. “I rate this current administration below average,” he said before he added most brutally, “when the head is rotten, the whole body is useless.”⁶²

In explaining his complicated relationship with Jonathan, Obasanjo said it was important to put it in context. He then offered something akin to a disclaimer, “You know of course that Jonathan was not my first choice as running mate to your late boss (Yar’Adua), it was Dr Peter Odili. But whether by fate or some conspiracy, Odili had hurdles that made it impossible for him to take the position. That was how I settled for Jonathan,” said Obasanjo. He admitted to not knowing Yar’Adua and Jonathan well enough, “but then you really cannot know people until you give them power and responsibility. That is when you will be able to gauge their capacity.”

Since it was the death of Yar’Adua that led to the emergence of Jonathan as President in 2010, there were always questions about what Obasanjo knew before he anointed a terminally ill man as his successor. Asked how much due diligence he did on Yar’Adua before anointing him for the PDP ticket, Obasanjo said there were two issues on which he sought clarification from Yar’Adua. “One, the lingering doubts about his health, while the other was a very pervasive allegation that he had a manipulative wife who had too much

influence on him.”

Going by Obasanjo’s account, Yar’Adua dismissed the allegation against his wife, suggesting that people were merely jealous of their closeness and the fact they never saw them quarrel in public. On the health front, Yar’Adua reportedly gave to Obasanjo the medical report he requested. “Not being a medical practitioner, I gave the report to a friend and renowned professional in the medical field who reviewed it and told me that the person in the report was not on dialysis, which meant either he didn’t have kidney problem or that he had successfully undergone a kidney transplant. That was the report I had about his health”, Obasanjo insisted.

Following Yar’Adua’s death, Obasanjo said he met with several northern leaders on the need to allow the constitution to prevail. He also explained why he endorsed Jonathan at the 2011 general election. “I saw the emergence of Jonathan as an opportunity to solve the problem of minority agitation. The three majority ethnic groups in Nigeria can always sort themselves out but not so for the minority. A good example is my state here in Ogun. Despite the best intentions, nobody from Ogun West has been able to become governor because of this minority issue and it will take a conscious effort to make it happen. So, it was in that context that I had to plead with prominent people in the North to allow Jonathan run for a term.”

According to the former President, there were some decisions taken by Jonathan very early in his administration that pointed to the fact that the office was bigger than him and one of them was the appointment of a petroleum minister. Obasanjo said he counselled against appointing Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke to such a critical sector. “He gave me the impression that he was not going to give her the portfolio but at the end he did and we can see the consequences. He of course knew what he was doing.”

Having parted ways with Jonathan, Obasanjo became the moving force in the opposition to the man he helped bring to power and when Buhari, (a former

military leader like him whom he had defeated at the 2003 election) became the rallying point against Jonathan, he lent his weight. But he has an explanation for his stance, “I didn’t join them in supporting Buhari, I joined in opposing Jonathan so Buhari was just a beneficiary of my opposition to Jonathan since my position was AOBJ: Any Option But Jonathan.” He added that Jonathan and his handlers believed they could buy the election “and they were so arrogant about it that the PDP would print only one nomination form for him and him alone. If he was wise, he would have yielded the ticket to somebody else in the PDP.”

As it would happen, Obasanjo devoted several pages to the Jonathan administration in his book, “My Watch”. Despite the efforts of Mr Buruji Kashamu⁶³ to stop the publication by shopping for all manner of court injunctions, the trilogy was eventually released and the contents proved very damaging to Jonathan. By presenting Jonathan as corrupt and lacking in the capacity to deal with the Boko Haram insurgency, Obasanjo was helping the Americans and the British to look in the direction of the opposition that was tending towards presenting a candidate believed to be strong on those key issues. Even while Obasanjo argues that he did not support Buhari, it must have been clear to him at the time, as it was to practically all Nigerians, that if it was not Jonathan, it would be Buhari, as far as the presidency was concerned.

Obasanjo’s attack against the Jonathan administration was ceaseless. By January 2015 when it was just a matter of weeks to the election, the former president further raised the stakes by accusing Jonathan of squandering \$25 billion crude oil savings left behind by his administration. He spoke while hosting the South-West women leaders at his residence in Abeokuta. “Our reserve after we had paid off this debt was about \$45 billion. As I said, they continued till the end of 2007, I heard that the reserve increased to almost \$67 billion before the end of the year. Our reserve now, I learnt, is left with around

only \$30 billion. That is why the Naira has been falling against the dollar,” he said.

Without mentioning any name but leaving no doubt that he was referring to Jonathan, the former President blamed the problem of Nigeria on a leadership he described as corrupt and incompetent. “In the profession I know very well, the military, what we normally say is that there are no bad soldiers but bad officers. If you see a situation where the soldiers are not doing well, you need to examine the officers in charge. So it is in the family, the community, the town and the country,” Obasanjo stated, as he admonished Nigerians to use their voters cards wisely at the general election.

Three weeks later and exactly two days after the election was rescheduled by six weeks, Obasanjo threw another bombshell while speaking in London. “It looks to me that the President is trying to play Gbagbo”, in apparent reference to the then incarcerated (by ICC) former President of Cote d’Ivoire who kept postponing the election in his country until he felt he could manipulate it. “I believe this is the sort of thing Nigeria may fall into if I am right in what I observed as the grand plan. We all remember that in the run-off, Gbagbo lost with 8% behind Ouattara and then refused to hand over. All reasonable persuasion and pleading was rebuffed by him and he unleashed horror in that country until nemesis caught up with him,” Obasanjo pointed out.

Obasanjo also criticized the role played by the military and security chiefs in the postponement of the elections, before going for the jugular, “I believe the President’s concern or fear is not about life out of office *per se*, because he and I have had occasions to talk about this both seriously and jovially. I believe the President’s fear is particularly motivated by the person he sees as his likely successor, that is General Buhari. I believe people would have been telling him that Buhari is a hard man, he would fight corruption and he (Jonathan) may end up in jail if not in the grave.”

This elicited an instant response from Fani-Kayode, a former Minister of

Aviation under Obasanjo. He accused his former boss of desperation in his bid to ensure Jonathan would not win the election. Fani-Kayode said of Obasanjo, “He has raised issues and made assertions that are capable of derailing our democracy and creating chaos in the land. It is vital that we consider his motives for this latest outburst and his credentials as a leader and an elder statesman. The truth is that he knows that President Goodluck Jonathan will win next month’s presidential election and that is why he wants to destroy the credibility of the whole process right from the outset.”

In the end, Obasanjo’s opposition to Jonathan’s second-term aspirations proved to be a determining factor in several respects. One, it emboldened the opposition and, for those still sitting on the fence, they were persuaded that an incumbent president could be defeated in Nigeria. Two, Obasanjo helped to weaken Jonathan both within the PDP and in the general population of the country, in the weeks preceding the election. Three, Obasanjo’s opposition gave fillip to the efforts of the Americans and British that had also concluded that a second-term for Jonathan would cause more problems for Nigeria. Four, even if it was by default, Obasanjo by wink and nod gave encouragement to members of Corporate Nigeria, who were always supporting the incumbent with billions of naira to the exclusion of the opposition, that this time, they could bank on Buhari.

What that ensured was that for the first time in four attempts at the presidency, Buhari had enormous resources to campaign across the country in leased aircraft, do an image makeover, hire entertainers for rallies, embark on an expensive media blitz and give Jonathan a good run for his money. In the end, that went a long way in helping to tilt the scale in his favour.

[60](#) Ezekwesili who would later go to the World Bank was a Minister in different portfolios like Education and Solid Minerals under Obasanjo.

[61](#) CAN stands for Christian Association of Nigeria

[62](#) Speaking at a book Launch in honour of the pioneer chairman of the

Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, (ICPC), Justice Mustapha Akanbi, in Abuja, Obasanjo said Jonathan should stop encouraging ‘verbal violence which may not physically hurt but has ways of degenerating into physical violence’.

[63](#) Kashamu is currently a senator but he is accused of involvement in a major drug case by the government of the United States where he has been declared wanted.

CHAPTER NINE

A LITANY OF UNFORCED ERRORS

If there was any validation that President Jonathan and his supporters wanted so desperately in the run-up to the 2015 elections, it was that of Christian clerics. From one church to another, Jonathan took turns to worship and where he could not go, his wife did. It was such expeditions that took Dame Patience Jonathan to the Catholic Prayer Adoration Ground in Enugu State on 9th December 2014, where the fiery cleric and founder of Adoration Ministries, Rev. Father Camillus Ejike Mbaka, called on all Nigerians to vote for her husband at the 2015 presidential election that was then just about two months away⁶⁴.

At the service, Father Mbaka told the First Lady, who was accompanied by the Deputy President of the Senate, Ike Ekweremadu, among others, that there was no threat to her husband's return to office. He also had harsh words for those tasking Jonathan to bring back the Chibok girls, asking whether it was the president that was keeping the girls hostage. After the service, Dame Patience Jonathan said she had experienced "a spiritual rebirth", especially after Father Mbaka released some birds which, he said, would go and fight for the Jonathans. Unfortunately, the "prophecy" did not endure because on the night of 31st December 2014, Father Mbaka threw darts at Jonathan, in a sermon titled, "From Good Luck to Bad Luck".

The church leader charged that Jonathan was turning a blind eye to the corruption he alleged was being perpetrated by those very close to the president. Tears trickling down his face, Mbaka cried out, "We need change. NEPA is not working because of corruption. The privatization of public companies has not yielded any fruit because of corruption. Nigerians are sick

and tired of wasting innocent lives without government doing enough to stop the destruction.”.

To demonstrate how much things had changed within just three weeks, Mbaka told his congregation of more than 30,000 worshippers who had gathered for his annual new year message, that the abduction of the Chibok girls (on which he had earlier defended the president) was proof enough that Jonathan “cannot guarantee the welfare, safety and security of the citizens.”

For maximum damage, Mbaka disclosed that one of the birds released during Dame Patience Jonathan’s visit had refused to fly. “All the other birds I released flew away but the healthiest of them which is Jonathan’s bird could not fly. I tried to make it fly but it could not fly,” said the cleric who then added a clincher, “Nigerians are calling for change. We need a change. We don’t want to move from bad luck to bad luck; Nigerians want to move from bad luck to good luck.”

Father Mbaka spent the remaining part of the sermon practically campaigning for the APC presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari and by the first day of the year, the video had gone viral. For many Nigerians, it was as shocking as it was unexpected. How did a supporter of Jonathan turn against him so dramatically?

The answer could be found in mismanaged relationships which ultimately cost Jonathan a lot at the poll. Incidentally, most of the problems were attributable to the women close to him. In the case of Mbaka, it was Dame Patience Jonathan who caused the “offence” as the cleric himself explained, “When she came here, I told her to give me her (mobile phone) number so that I could give her messages, but thrice she refused. It was later she told one of the pastors with her to give me his number. So, before that message, I had called the number for two weeks but it was always the Personal Assistant to the pastor that picked the calls.”

There were two things Mbaka did not know. One, the man who collected his number was not a pastor. From my findings, it was the Executive Secretary of the Nigeria Christian Pilgrims Commission, Mr John Kennedy Opara who collected the number. Two, there was an incident concerning a bottle of anointed oil Mbaka had given Dame Patience Jonathan. In the process of loading the luggage into the presidential jet, according to a security man on the team that day, the big bottle fell on the ground and broke. The First Lady was neither aware nor was she informed and it took a week later when she asked for the anointing oil bottle that she was told. It was not a pleasant day for the aides that were around to witness what followed that disclosure as they were accused of working for the defeat of Jonathan.

Meanwhile, even though Dame Patience Jonathan never offered an explanation as to why she refused to pick the calls of Mbaka whose endorsement she publicly sought, what was never in doubt is the fact that the utterances and activities of the First Lady did not help the perception of the President. Yet, the failure to control his household was not only a big negative for Jonathan, it was lending credence to the 2012 WikiLeaks report that his wife has a more forceful personality than him and that he “has little or no control over her.”

Despite being conscious of the educational and social deficits of his wife, Jonathan failed to insulate her from making a mockery of his position. For instance, in the course of a PDP rally in Calabar, Cross River State, on 2nd March 2015, Dame Patience Jonathan urged PDP members to stone anyone that promised them change, which was the APC slogan. “Anybody that come and tell you change, stone that person,” the First Lady could be heard telling the crowd in a video clip that immediately went viral. “Anybody that tells you change, tell that person, carry your change and get away,” she added.

Throughout her husband’s tenure, Dame Patience Jonathan made several gaffes which elicited jokes on social media, but making an enemy of Mbaka on

account of her telephone number, proved very costly. Such mishaps became the norm. At a time when Jonathan needed to rally support, he and his aides went from one avoidable error to another such that in the weeks preceding the election, valuable time was spent dousing unnecessary fires.

The negative perceptions of Jonathan were due largely to acts of omission or commission both on his part and that of others around him. They ultimately became the lens through which the general public viewed him as a person and as President. For instance, in October 2011, Jonathan was at the Commonwealth meeting in Perth, Australia, but he failed to show up at an important event that had the Queen at the podium. Similarly, when on 26th May 2013 he was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the Special Assembly to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the African Union (AU), he missed the opportunity to give his speech. There were whispered insinuations about alcoholism.

The rumours were strong enough to elicit a presidential media intervention. “Alcohol is not served during official duties. Yes, when there is an international function, wine is served, but nobody gets drunk around here (presidency). That will amount to an act of indiscipline. The President himself does not allow alcohol to be served at his table. But when you go to social media, they tell you something else. Lies. Lies. Lies,” wrote Reuben Abati who took on “all the cynics, the pestle-wielding critics, the unrelenting, self-appointed activists, the idle and idling, twittering, collective children of anger, the distracted crowd of Facebook addicts, the BBM-pinging soap opera gossips of Nigeria, who seem to be in competition among themselves to pull down President Goodluck Jonathan.”⁶⁵

Despite Abati’s efforts to debunk the insinuations fuelled largely by social media, such unpleasant stories never really went away, thus reinforcing the negative perception about the President that would dog him up until re-election day.

Another gaffe was his ‘Democracy Day’ broadcast on 29th May 2012, in which Jonathan announced the renaming the University of Lagos (UNILAG) as Moshood Abiola University in honour of the presumed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. The gesture backfired in spectacular fashion when students of the institution took to the streets. What was meant to be a public relations gambit to woo the South-West became an albatross for Jonathan. With the opposition using the issue to attack him, the fact that Jonathan eventually reversed the act diminished him in the eyes of many Nigerians. It also proved that the idea was not altruistic and that the president lacked courage and conviction.

Apparently learning no lesson from that misadventure, the president’s handlers believed that holding a national conference, which Jonathan had at various times rejected, would win him the support of people from the region where the clamour for it had been most strident. It was the second gamble to secure the votes of South-West after the abortive attempt to rename the University of Lagos.

To kick-start the process, Jonathan, on 1st October 2013, announced a panel of planners for a national conference. Despite his earlier opposition to the conference, a new reality had compelled him to change his position. “Today, we are taking historic and concrete steps that will further strengthen our understanding, expand the frontiers of our inclusiveness and deepen our bond as one people under God”, he said as he inaugurated the panel, two weeks later.

The conference, Jonathan said, would “review the foundational principles that drive our action, and also address a few matters arising. This is a national project, a sincere and fundamental undertaking aimed at realistically examining and genuinely resolving, long-standing impediments to our cohesion and harmonious development as a truly united nation.”

The first challenge came from the APC which poured cold water on the idea

by saying it would not be participating in the national conference. Alhaji Lai Mohammed, who spoke on behalf of the party after a National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting attended by the APC governors, stated that the Jonathan administration did not have the credibility to convene such a conference. “What we see today is that this government has lost focus, it has lost credibility, it has lost control of the economy while corruption has attained uncontrollable proportions,” the APC spokesman said.

Next to go on the attack were northern elders who alleged that there were hidden motives, among which – to whip up regional sentiments, divert attention and blackmail the North. The position was made known after a meeting in Kano to chart a course for the region at the conference. Former Federal Permanent Secretary, Dr Hakeem Baba-Ahmed said the idea of a national conference was “deliberately designed to cause havoc to northern unity and deepen its problems. This will make it easier for President Jonathan to exploit the fallout for his re-election campaigns.”⁶⁶

Baba-Ahmed called for an outright boycott, or, in the alternative, that northern delegates should withdraw their participation whenever the conference began to take an anti-North dimension. “The North will participate at this conference at best as a spectator or at worst a helpless victim of a conspiracy to exploit its weakness,” he announced, adding that, “every northerner who walks out robs the conference of more of the very little credibility it has. The more of you (delegates) that walk out, the less likely it will be that they will claim that they held a national conference.”

If there was anything the conference succeeded in doing, it was to rally the North against Jonathan. In August 2014, members of the Northern Delegates Forum (NDF) rejected a substantial part of the recommendations which called for a new constitution, saying they were not privy to it. NDF’s Co-chairman and former Inspector-General of Police, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomassie, in rejecting the idea of a new constitution, called on stakeholders of all

persuasions to reject the outcome of the conference.

The situation was not helped by the fact that in the course of the conference and amid the bickering that had already assumed ethnic dimensions, some wayfarers from the North, numbering almost 500, were arrested in buses heading to the South-East and labelled as insurgents. While the Defence Headquarters claimed to have found some wanted kingpins among the suspects, many northern leaders maintained they were traders and called for their unconditional release at a time when ancient suspicions and long held prejudices had resurfaced.

What the episode succeeded in doing was to create an impression, especially in the North-East and North-West, that their people were being discriminated against by the Jonathan administration with no one to explain or counter the negative narrative. Other errors were being committed. For instance, on 11th March 2015, the Kingdom of Morocco announced the immediate recall of its Ambassador from Abuja, following a statement by the Nigerian Government that their monarch did not snub President Jonathan.

It all started with a report that King Mohammed VI had turned down a request by Jonathan for a telephone conversation and possibly, an invitation to Nigeria. The Moroccan Foreign Ministry said the request was more a devious move by Jonathan to curry electoral favour than a genuine diplomatic move. “The request by Nigerian authorities for a phone conversation between HM King Mohammed VI and Nigerian President was refused by the Monarch who deemed it inappropriate on grounds of the upcoming elections in Nigeria,” the statement read.

Ordinarily, the King of Morocco is not of political significance in Nigeria, and whether or not he spoke to our president should be no issue. But in refuting the Moroccan statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed that both leaders spoke. “Since the King was in France and not in Morocco, both leaders spoke extensively over the telephone on matters of mutual interest and

concern that have nothing to do with the conduct of re-scheduled elections in Nigeria. It is therefore preposterous to suggest that Mr President's telephone call to the Moroccan monarch was intended to confer any electoral advantage on the President," the statement read.

Apparently infuriated by the claim, the Moroccan authorities issued a strongly worded rebuttal, this time from the palace, describing the claim that a discussion took place between King Mohammed and President Jonathan as "unethical practices." The statement said it wished to, in the "clearest and strongest terms" categorically deny "the false allegations made by Nigerian authorities about an alleged phone conversation between the Sovereign and Nigerian President."

As a follow-up to that, the Moroccan foreign ministry stated that the king had actually declined the request of the Nigerian government while expressing "its astonishment and denunciation to these unethical practices that are contrary to the spirit of responsibility that must prevail in relations between states."

When it became apparent that the Moroccan authorities were not ready to back down on the issue, a statement came from Aso Rock that Jonathan did not speak on telephone with the King of Morocco as claimed by the foreign affairs ministry. Jonathan, according to the statement, was "shocked, surprised and highly embarrassed by the controversy that has erupted over whether or not he had a telephone conversation with His Majesty, King Mohammed VI of Morocco."

The president was also reported to have ordered the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aminu Wali, to urgently undertake a full investigation of the claim which emanated from the ministry. "The investigation is to identify all those who were responsible for the unacceptable act of official misinformation which has resulted in an unnecessary diplomatic row with another country and national embarrassment," said a statement.

How Morocco came to the calculations of Jonathan remains a mystery, as nobody could offer a coherent explanation about what happened, but the embarrassing controversy coming about three weeks to the election helped to further diminish Jonathan and of course, the APC did not allow the opportunity to pass unexploited. This prompted the presidency to “urge Nigerians to disregard the vituperations of opposition elements, who have, true to type, latched on to the regrettable *faux pas* as a fresh opportunity to unpatriotically denigrate the government of their country and advance their irresponsible quest for victory at any price in the coming elections,” in response to APC’s call for an investigation.

If the Moroccan embarrassment was of little significance, a last-minute decision by Nigeria to abstain from voting at the United Nations (UN) Security Council session on 31st December 2014 was unhelpful to Jonathan not only in the North, but also among southern Muslims. The decision had helped to defeat a resolution calling for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory by 2017. Ordinarily, it would not have changed the situation considering that the United States would still have used its veto power to render the resolution inconsequential, but it would have earned for the Palestinian people a moral victory.

The resolution drafted by the Palestinians and backed by Arab countries was to pave the way to a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The resolution was to give 12 months for a “just, lasting and comprehensive peaceful solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which it regards as the creation of a “sovereign and viable” Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, as well as the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the occupied territory by 2017. There had been several amendments to the text, especially concerning issues like East Jerusalem being the capital of the future state of Palestine, building of Israeli settlements in certain locations, Palestinian refugees’ right of return, etc.

Nigeria has always supported the Palestinian cause as one of the kernels of our foreign policy and it was taken for granted that we would endorse the resolution. For it to pass, the Palestinians needed nine votes in the 15-member Security Council, but after securing the votes of China, France, Russia, Argentina, Chad, Chile, Jordan and Luxembourg, the expectation was that Nigeria's vote would secure the deal. At the crucial moment, Nigeria's envoy, Prof. Joy Ogwu, led our country to join Britain, Lithuania, the Republic of Korea and Rwanda to abstain. With Australia and the United States voting against, the resolution was defeated.

It was seen by majority of Muslims in Nigeria as a betrayal and helped to drive a wedge between supporters of the President in the North who believed the decision was taken for religious reasons. The issue became all the more controversial against the background that it was already on record that Nigeria had pledged to vote for the resolution. "Our stand and policy is very clear and there is no change in our position," said the then Foreign Minister, Mr Olugbenga Ashiru⁶⁷ in September 2011, in response to the insinuation that Jonathan's separate meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak, at the sidelines of the UN General Assembly could lead to a change in Nigeria's position.

While many Nigerians were aghast by the change of position on the issue with international reverberations, Netanyahu was quick to praise Jonathan for abstaining. "I want to express appreciation and gratitude to the United States and Australia, as well as special appreciation to the President of Rwanda, my friend Paul Kagame, and to the President of Nigeria, my friend Goodluck Jonathan," the Israeli leader said.

Explaining how he secured the deal, Netanyahu said he made personal phone calls to the two presidents. "I spoke with both of them, they promised me personally that they would not support this decision, and they stood by their

words. That is what tipped the scales,” he added. The Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman rubbed it in by saying that “the Palestinian failure should teach them that provocation and attempts to force unilateral concessions on Israel will lead nowhere, quite the opposite.”

In expressing his shock, the Palestine Ambassador to Nigeria, Montaser Abuzaid, said his country and its people were disappointed and hurt at how Nigeria abstained from voting in support of the resolution to end Israeli occupation. “We respect Nigeria so much because it was one of the first countries that recognized the Palestine state since 1988 and it has been supporting all resolutions concerning our state but my country and our people are shocked with the abstinence at the UN Security Council yesterday.”

The ambassador also explained that prior to the vote, he got a firm commitment from the Nigerian authorities that nothing had changed. “More than a month ago, I contacted the Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked them if they will vote for us and they promised to. Also yesterday, when my Minister of Foreign Affairs called me to know Nigeria’s stand on the issue, I called three different people to know if they will vote for us and they promised me that they will but I was surprised to wake up this morning and see that the decision was changed,” Abuzaid said.

There were many other decisions that further diminished the credibility of the Jonathan presidency, one of them being the management of the Ombatse crisis which also had a religious subtext.

On 10th May 2013, the Nasarawa State Police Command announced that, out of the 90 Police officers, excluding other security officers, on a mission to arrest the chief priest of Ombatse Shrine, located at Alakyo village, about 10 kilometres from Lafia, the state capital, only 17 had returned so far, with various degrees of injury. Ombatse literally means “time has come” in Eggon language.

It was such a tragedy that Jonathan cancelled his scheduled visit to Namibia to personally oversee efforts by security agencies to contain the new security challenge. On a state visit to South Africa, Jonathan was expected to proceed to Namibia in continuation of his investment drive across Africa.

Unfortunately, rather than find the culprits and prosecute them, the Director General of the State Security Services (SSS), Mr Ekpenyong Ita, said he forgave those who killed ten officers. That prompted Buhari to react in a tone that rhymed with public mood, “The SSS boss or whoever that said he has left everything to God has no right to do that. Constitutionally, Nigerians can practice any religion they want or even if they don’t want, they can be atheist or anything they want to be, that is constitutional. But nobody should hurt a citizen of Nigeria and then get away with it, not to talk of slaughtering at least 56 law enforcement agents and then somebody coming out from the system to say such a thing. It is either that person doesn’t know what he was talking about or he shouldn’t even be there.”

Unfortunately, the challenge of the Jonathan administration was not limited to the public domain. There were also some internal tensions that occasionally filtered onto the social media platforms, especially those relating to in-fighting among members of the President’s inner caucus. Even some female members of the Federal Executive Council were not on speaking terms and were known to be sponsoring damaging stories against one another in the media with negative consequences for the administration they claimed to be serving.

Jonathan’s management of party politics was not better. He was not even in control of the PDP in Bayelsa State. He had to pardon Alamieyeseigha in order to gain some foothold at his home front. And then, he sowed the seeds of rebellion by the way he handled the affairs of the party at the national level. Could he have achieved better control if he had allowed the party some independence and insisted on a structure and some principles? He could still have emerged as the candidate in 2015, given his incumbency and financial

muscle, and the PDP would have been in better shape than it was at March 2015.

In the build-up to the election, the handlers of the President, for whatever reasons, decided to go the Abacha route of adoption by the party rather than conduct any presidential primaries, which he ordinarily would have won. Edging out other potential contenders and not allowing a contest was a huge miscalculation. Besides, the state congresses of the PDP to pick gubernatorial candidates became acrimonious as the outgoing governors manipulated the processes to ensure the victory of their anointed candidates. In many of the states, those who lost out at the PDP primaries crossed over to the APC. These included Ministers in the Jonathan government who had resigned just a few weeks before to contest the primaries. Of the eight that resigned, only one, Nyesom Wike, secured the ticket of his party as flag-bearer in Rivers State. The others, including Information Minister, Labaran Maku and Samuel Ortom (current Governor of Benue) left the PDP to swell the rank of the opposition.

To compound the problem, Jonathan was too involved and became a disruptive force in the politics of PDP leadership. He was instrumental to the quick removal of Chief Vincent Ogbulafor and Dr Okwesilizie Nwodo early in the life of the administration, before Dr Haliru Bello assumed the party chairmanship. The exigency of zoning led to the emergence of Alhaji Bamanga Tukur as PDP National Chairman, but the process was not only crooked and manipulated, it was clear Tukur was not the choice of the North-East. In the North-East Zonal Congress held on 21st March 2012 to nominate the National Chairman, Dr Babayo Musa polled 14 votes to the two scored by Tukur who was nonetheless still anointed by Jonathan. That was to dog him throughout his tenure. Eventually, he was replaced by Mu'azu who became the 6th PDP Chairman under Jonathan, all within a period of five years. One of them, Abubakar Baraje, led the break-away faction that later merged with the APC.

Explaining how the PDP unravelled, Babangida Aliyu put the blame

squarely at Jonathan's doorstep. "In August 2013 at the PDP Convention, the delegates from Rivers State were changed at the instance of the President because of his fight with Amaechi, while the delegates from Adamawa State were also changed by Bamanga Tukur. We did everything to make the President see reason but he refused to listen to us. That was the beginning of the problem that led to five governors leaving the PDP," Aliyu diagnosed.

Apart from the foregoing, another strategic miscalculation that proved to be very costly for Jonathan was the order of elections. Since 1999, National Assembly elections have always come first and as stand-alone. If that trend had continued, according to David Mark, "I believe PDP would have won majority of the seats in the North since elections at that level would be local. That would quite naturally have helped his own election. But by putting the presidential election first, and he must have had a hand in it, Jonathan exposed himself to what eventually happened, especially in the North."

Some people within the PDP, according to Mark, tried to point the attention of Jonathan to the implication of having the presidential election joined with that of the National Assembly, "but the President obviously had his advisers who felt they knew everything. If he was not complacent and had fought the election as vigorously as he did in 2011, Jonathan would have understood that there was a strong clamour for change, and I would say, just for its sake. PDP had been in power for 16 years and Nigerians were tired of the same party."

[64](#) The presidential election was slated for 14th February 2015 before it was later shifted to 31st March.

[65](#) Abati, who was spokesman to President Jonathan, wrote the piece, published in The Guardian on 26th August 2012, and from which stories were taken by other newspapers.

[66](#) Dr Hakeem Baba-Ahmed was the keynote speaker at a meeting of Northern leaders held a meeting in Kano, to chart a course for the region at the National Conference.

[67](#) The then Nigerian Foreign Minister, now deceased.

CHAPTER TEN

ELECTION POSTPONED...

When the Council of State met on 5th February 2015 to discuss the general election that was only about three weeks away, a cloud of uncertainty had already enveloped the nation. It was therefore no surprise that at the end of the eight-hour meeting, Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State and his Ondo State counterpart, Olusegun Mimiko would give different interpretations to the proceedings. While the former, a member of the opposition APC said it was resolved that the election should go ahead, the latter, a member of the ruling PDP said council advised INEC to reflect over the concerns raised by members and the suggestion that it would be better for the election to be rescheduled.

The drama was a reflection of what transpired at the meeting attended by all the living former Nigerian leaders except Obasanjo. In attendance also were all the governors except three who were represented by their deputies. The session started with the then Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Raji Fashola⁶⁸, drawing the attention of Council to the presence of the Secretary to the Federal Government (SGF), Mr Anyim Pius Anyim, who he argued had no right to be in attendance because the Constitution specifically listed Council membership and the SGF was not among.

A debate ensued about whether or not Anyim should be allowed. At the end, there was consensus that since the SGF office serves as secretariat for the Council, it was proper for Anyim to attend without having a voice. But what the opposition had done with the SGF issue was to set the tone of what was to come. Meanwhile, the PDP, according to Babangida Aliyu, went into the meeting unprepared.

The session held against the background of a statement made a week earlier in the United Kingdom by the then National Security Adviser (NSA), Col. Sambo Dasuki (ret'd.)⁶⁹ that INEC should delay the elections in order to allow for proper preparations and distribution of Permanent Voter Cards (PVCs). He spoke at the Chatham House in London where he disclosed that as at then, INEC had distributed only 30 million cards, aside from other challenges that were envisioned as a result of the fact that it would be the first time that the bio-metric cards would be used for elections.

At the Council of State meeting, Jega presented his report, reiterating that INEC was ready for the polls and he gave a breakdown on the contentious issue of collection of the PVCs. As at 4th February, according to Jega, of the 68,833,476 Nigerians registered to vote, 45,098,876 persons had collected their PVCs representing 65.81 percent. He also gave a breakdown of the collection figures by states.

The first person to speak after his presentation was Dasuki, who harped on the renewed efforts by the Multinational Joint Task Force⁷⁰ to dislodge the Boko Haram insurgents and the need to shift the date of the elections. Dasuki restated his case that more time was needed for the election to be credible. He also highlighted the security concerns as well as the rate of collection of PVCs. The Armed Forces Service Chiefs and the Director General of the State Security Service (SSS) followed with similar presentations.

Apart from Buhari who opposed rescheduling of the election on account of security reasons – especially when, in his view, soldiers had minimal a role to play in the process – the real debate at the meeting was on the distribution of the PVCs. There were allegations, especially by the PDP, that the distribution was skewed against their areas of strength. For instance, of the 610,373 registered voters in Bayelsa State where Jonathan hails from, 386,125 representing 63 percent had collected their PVCs. Meanwhile, of the 2,827,943 registered to vote in Buhari's home state of Katsina, 2,245,303

representing 79 percent had collected their PVCs.

With Jega's papers having been circulated to members ahead of the meeting, many of the politicians in the room had also done their political calculations. "It was very obvious to us that collection of PVCs was very high in the North-West and North-East, zones that could be considered the catchment area of the APC because of Buhari, while the collection was very low in the South-South and South-East which was the home base of Jonathan. There was no way we would accept that", a politician close to Jonathan who did not want to be named told me of why the president wanted the election shifted.

The position of Jonathan and that of the PDP prior to the Council of State meeting was that the elections should be postponed. The argument was that by virtue of Section 132 (2) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), there was time for INEC to make adjustment in the timetable for elections. But the real worry was in the distribution of the PVCs, even though that would be too divisive a point to make an issue; especially since many backers of the president at the meeting were also northerners.

In a detailed presentation that may have been the position of the APC, Fashola argued, almost as if he was in a courtroom, why the elections had to go ahead. He examined the possible implications of such a postponement from both the legal and political prisms, with the conclusion that it would not bode well for the country and the President. But the then Cross River State Governor, Mr Liyel Imoke, countered Fashola's arguments by emphasizing the lack of preparedness by INEC. Some of the issues Imoke raised included the "lop-sidedness" in the distribution of PVCs nationwide, the fact that the card readers to be used by INEC had yet to be tested and that electoral officials to be deployed had not even been trained.

At that point, Jega sought to respond and was given the floor. He explained that most of the misgivings being expressed had been factored into INEC plans. He, however, added that it was unrealistic to expect a hundred percent turn-out

of voters at elections as there is no such thing anywhere in the world. To this, the then Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Mr Godswill Akpabio,⁷¹ reportedly countered that Jega was wrong. Akpabio argued that there was a difference between people who may choose not to vote even if they have PVCs and those who cannot do so because they have been denied what ordinarily should be their rights. He said elections cannot be credible in situations where millions of people could not get what would enable them to exercise their franchise.

Aliyu shed some light on the misgivings of the PDP, telling me they opposed the card readers because “we doubted the readiness of INEC for its use and I recall I said so at the Council of State meeting”. What riled the party the more, he suggested, was the fact that Jonathan was not briefed by INEC on such a fundamental change in the electoral system. “That for me was also not right. Besides, there were so many uncertainties about the card reader at the time. I posed questions about whether or not it could be hacked and there was no coherent response from Jega. There was also the issue with the distribution of PVCs. There were just too many things that did not add up but the INEC Chairman had his way,” Aliyu stated.

Canvassing for INEC to go ahead with the polls since the commission said it was ready, the then Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal⁷², noted that the advisory role of the Council of State did not extend to election matters. At that point, the President drew the attention of Tambuwal and all attendees to the Third Schedule (Part 1) of the 1999 Constitution, especially Section B (6) which states that the Council of State “shall have the power to (A) advise the President in exercise of his powers with respect to the... (4) the Independent National Electoral Commission (including appointment of members of the commission).”

In his own intervention, General Ibrahim Babangida argued that since INEC said it was ready for the polls, the real issue before the Council was on what to do about the four states where the security agencies said they needed more

time to deal with the insurgency. The former Head of State wondered whether it was feasible to conduct elections only in 32 states. Jonathan interjected quickly that such an election would end in fiasco. Instructively, some people in the administration had suggested this idea to Jega in November 2014 and his reply was that an election that excised a section of the country would not pass the test of credibility or even for that matter, legitimacy. So Jonathan knew that succumbing to such an idea would be politically suicidal for him and he rejected it outright.

However, from the way the meeting went, it was evident that positions had been taken along party lines. In the end, the responsibility was pushed to INEC, which faced the problem of announcing the “decision” to Nigerians when in fact nothing had been decided. The President asked Governors Olusegun Mimiko, Rochas Okorocha and Bala Ngilari⁷³ to brief the media, and all three rushed to the press room to grab the centre chair. Mimiko arrived there first and said no decision was taken and that INEC would consult and announce whether to postpone the elections or not, which was the most accurate rendering as to what transpired.

Immediately Mimiko stood up and they all appeared to be leaving, Okorocha grabbed the chair that the former Ondo State Governor had been sitting on and also started to brief the State House correspondents. He said the Council had decided that the elections should go ahead. While that was not a true reflection of what happened, it was the slant reported in the media – a reflection of public mood at the time.

Meanwhile, prior to the meeting, some people within the administration had weighed up two options. The first was to get the elections postponed (as eventually happened). The other option, also canvassed by some hawks within the administration, was to invoke Section 135, subsection 3 of the 1999 Constitution which states, “If the Federation is at war in which the territory of Nigeria is physically involved and the President considers that it is not

practicable to hold elections, the National Assembly may by resolution extend the period of four years mentioned in subsection (2) of this section from time to time; but no such extension shall exceed a period of six months at any one time.”

The calculation of those who were canvassing this position was that with majority of the National Assembly members having lost out in the primaries of their parties hence not coming back, many of them would jump at any arrangement that would offer them a six-month ‘extra time’.

On 7th February after a series of meetings with the leadership of the registered political parties, representatives of civil society organizations and all the resident electoral commissioners, Jega announced a postponement of the elections by six weeks in deference to the military. While the presidential and National Assembly elections were rescheduled to be held on 28th March, the gubernatorial and State House of Assembly elections were slated for 11th April 2015. The issue of security which necessitated the rescheduling of the elections, according to Jega, was outside the purview of INEC, even as he insisted the commission was ready to conduct the polls.

The next day, Jega was at the Senate where he was asked for a guarantee that the elections would hold as rescheduled. He said he could not give such a commitment on issues that were beyond his control. That prompted Dasuki, who had been accused by the APC of “crude and fraudulent action to help the political interests of President Goodluck Jonathan,” to announce that within the six-week period, all Boko Haram camps would be “taken out”. He averred that the new dates of 28th March and 11th April were sacrosanct.

In defending his position at the time, Dasuki rejected the notion that political considerations were behind his call for the postponement of the election. “Somebody looking at it the other way would say I’m helping the APC,” he said since the northeast states hardest hit by Boko Haram were all opposition strongholds. “If the military pacifies the area over the next six weeks, more

people can get to the polls”, said Dasuki⁷⁴.

In explaining the shift, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh said the military requested for the six weeks to enable the Defence Headquarters take delivery of military hardware it ordered to frontally combat Boko Haram. “When you make orders (for arms and ammunitions), it takes time to produce and it takes time also to train on them. So, we did not place the orders today, we had placed orders before now and when they started coming, we asked for more time to combat the militants before the elections and I can guarantee you that there is no politics in the demand for shift in date, it was just because we were receiving the equipment,” he clarified.

However, the opposition was not convinced that the idea to postpone the election was so simplistic. Tinubu told me that before the decision was taken, they already had a hint that the Jonathan administration was contemplating postponing the election for two reasons. “One, they saw the trend which showed they were losing and this led to the second reason. The thinking was that by postponing the election, they would stretch us financially since one of their main calculations for winning was to use money. They therefore felt that we would have exhausted our funds by adding the extra weeks, hoping to lull us into inactivity and despondency. Meanwhile, they imagined that their political fortunes would improve with the deployment of money at a time they had deliberately squeezed us.”

Part of that plan, according to Tinubu, was to block all sources of opposition funding. “I was aware that all my accounts and that of people close to me were being monitored just as they were doing to other key figures within the APC. But some of us were ahead of them because it was the sort of desperate measure we anticipated. Meanwhile, I was approached by some of their operatives because their projection was that without the South-West, there was no chance of winning so they were desperate to win South-West,” he said.

Over the six weeks interregnum, there were strident calls from the PDP for

the removal of Jega. There was a precedence for this, as those who wanted the INEC Chairman's ouster cited the case of his predecessor, Prof. Maurice Iwu, whose tenure was due to expire on 13th June 2010 but was on 28th April 2010 ordered to proceed on terminal leave by Jonathan. Apparently flying a kite, there were media reports that Jega could also be asked to go on terminal leave effective 1st March. Jega's Chief Press Secretary, Mr Kayode Idowu, countered, "Jega is busy preparing for the elections and you are asking about terminal leave. Does anyone planning to conduct elections go on terminal leave? There is nothing like that." Idowu who added that Jega's appointment was not guided by civil service rules and would serve until the end of his tenure on June 30.

When attempts to force Jega out appeared unpopular, the focus shifted to the credibility of the card reader. On 4th March 2015, the PDP Presidential Campaign Organisation restated the party's concern. "There are bases for genuine concern over the use of the machine, for the first time, in a crucial election of this magnitude," said Fani-Kayode, who added that the PDP was already aware that the APC was "working in cahoots with some strategically placed elements to use the card readers to frustrate accreditation in some parts of the country. They were very comfortable with the fact that 34 percent of registered voters had not collected their PVCs as at February 14 before the presidential election was postponed."

Despite the pressure, Jega appeared before the senate and insisted that the commission would not reverse its decision to use card readers for the accreditation of voters. He reported that, of the 182,000 card readers acquired by INEC, only 500 failed when they were tested. On permanent voter cards, Jega informed that the collection period had been extended for four weeks to March 8, and that as at 17th February, the collection rate of PVCs nationwide averaged 75.94 percent.

The INEC Chairman emphasised the importance of the card reader, pointing

out that it enables authentication of the identity of the voter by matching his or her fingerprint with the code on the chip of the card while it keeps a tally of all cards read, verified or authenticated with all their details, including the timing. These details could be sent to a central server via SMS, he added.

The information stored on the server would enable INEC to audit results from polling units as well as produce statistical analyses of the demographics of voting, something INEC had never, until that point, been able to do effectively, according to Jega. “The ward collation officer can use this information to audit polling unit result sheets and to determine whether accreditation figures have been altered, a common feature of electoral fraud in our jurisdiction” he said.

After his presentation and the demonstration of the use of card reader, Senate President David Mark assured that the interaction was meant to assist the INEC Chairman to conduct a free, fair and credible election. Mark quipped to Jega and to roaring laughter in the chamber, “Everybody seated here, I can tell you, wants to come back through the back door.”

Meanwhile, whatever may have been the real motivation for postponing the election, the military authorities spent the six-week time window to decimate Boko Haram in the North-East, such that it was possible to conduct elections in Borno and Yobe, the two states that serve as the operational base of the insurgency. But it should have also occurred to Jonathan’s handlers at the same time that they were going to be dealt a fatal political blow in those two states.

While Governor Ibrahim Geidam of Yobe State was a friend of Jonathan, having been deputy governors at the same time, there was little he could do for the President. Meanwhile, the bond of trust between the duo of Governors Shettima and Nyako and the President had broken down irretrievably. Looking back, Shettima told me he had met with Jonathan 13 times on the Boko Haram crisis and only one was at Jonathan’s instance. “All the others were at my seeking appointments to see him and on some occasions, it took several weeks

for such request to be granted. There was a belief around President Jonathan that the whole Boko Haram crisis was orchestrated to undermine him and his administration and because of that, there was no interest in resolving the problem. And because I kept pushing, I was marked,” the Borno governor reflected.

Shettima unburdened himself further, revealing that, before the declaration of the State of Emergency in three states – Bauchi, Yobe and Borno – Jonathan actually considered removing the governors⁷⁵. “He particularly wanted to remove me”, said Shettima who disclosed that three people prevented Jonathan from taking that line of action. “The first is the then speaker, now Governor of Sokoto State, Aminu Tambuwal, who told Jonathan that such a proclamation would not get the endorsement of the House of Representatives. I got wind at the time that the Senate President, David Mark had convinced Jonathan that there would be no problem at the Senate.”

Jonathan took the matter to the Federal Executive Council. As Shettima related it, “I heard that his Attorney General and Justice Minister, Mr Mohammed Bello Adoke, said there was nowhere in the Constitution where the President had the power to remove a governor. In fact, I was told that President Jonathan reportedly interjected by asking, ‘How come President Obasanjo removed Governor Joshua Dariye?’” to which he was reminded that the Dariye aberration had been declared illegal by the Supreme Court.”

In Shettima’s version of events, the then Minister for Special Duties, Alhaji Kabiru TanimuTuraki, the only other Senior Advocate in the room, joined Adoke to argue that such a decision would be illegal. “Badeh, his Chief of Defence Staff has come out to confirm what I said about the capacity of the military and the firepower of Boko Haram,” recalled Shettima. “I wish I was proved wrong because I take no comfort in what happened, given the misery of my people. But it is sad that President Jonathan allowed petty politics to becloud his judgement. I say that with every sense of responsibility because he

is essentially a good man for whom I have great admiration. But he allowed himself to be misled by those around him.”

In the weeks preceding the general election, what to do about Borno and Yobe was part of the strategic calculations. Jonathan knew he was not going to win the two states where the rate of PVC collections was very high. By then, the APC electioneering propaganda machine had seized the moral high ground with their campaign of “Change” which resonated with a large majority of Nigerians, even as they painted Jonathan as “clueless” and “corrupt”. Besides pledging to contain the Boko Haram insurgency while fighting corruption, the Buhari campaign team also promised to revamp the economy that had begun to totter.

It was obvious by 2012 that oil prices had become too volatile for Nigeria to continue to rely on it as the main source of revenue. With the price fluctuations leading to reductions in foreign exchange inflow against the background of mounting imports and domestic expenditure, it was only a matter of time before the bubble would burst, and the signs were all very clear in the run up to the election.

Meanwhile, there were no promises in the books that the APC did not make to Nigerians during the campaigns for the 2015 general elections, even though their flag-bearer cumulatively spoke for less than two hours, if you had heard all of what he said at all the campaign stops in one session. But others made lavish promises on his behalf: From instituting state and community policing, to banning government officials from seeking medical care abroad, to the implementation of the National Gender Policy, including reserving 35 percent of appointive positions for women, to the revival of Ajaokuta Steel Complex. There were many other promises contained in some glossy publications that Nigerians believed had the authority of Buhari⁷⁶.

Nigerians were told that within a period of four years, the Buhari administration would generate, transmit and distribute at least 20,000 MW of

electricity while providing employment for no fewer than 740,000 graduates across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Other promises include the establishment of a free-tuition and scholarship scheme for pupils who show exceptional aptitude in science subjects at O/Levels to study ICT-related courses, creating three million jobs per year besides vocational training, entrepreneurial and skills acquisition schemes for graduates as well as establishing a Small Business Loan Guarantee Scheme to create at least five million new jobs by 2019.

The Buhari administration, according to his campaign manifesto, was going to provide one free meal (to include fruits) daily, for public primary school pupils; eradicate State of Origin requirement by replacing it with State of Residence; amend the Constitution and the Land Use Act to create freehold/leasehold interests in land along with matching grants for states to create a nationwide electronic land title register on a state by state basis. It was also going to construct 3,000 kilometres of super-highway including service trunks while building up to 4,800 kilometres of modern railway lines, etc⁷⁷.

Unchallenged by the then ruling PDP that apparently believed it could buy its way back to power with money being taken from the treasury, Nigerians were left to swallow all manner of promises from the APC and Buhari in an election in which the incumbent had lost so much credibility. When it became obvious that Buhari could win, PDP leaders began to raise questions about the health of the APC candidate. With an orchestrated campaign on social media, all forms of ailments were said to be afflicting Buhari, raising a scare that reminded Nigerians of the fate that befell President Yar'Adua and the national crisis his health challenge generated.

While the whispering campaigns continued, on 15th January 2015, Governor Ayo Fayose of Ekiti State, in blaming Obasanjo for Buhari's aspiration, raised a poser. "Why is Obasanjo going after an old horse that may

collapse midway?” Fayose questioned, before adding that, “Nigerians should know the state of health of Buhari. His age and health cannot stand the rigours of the office. Nigerians deserve to know the health status of Buhari.”

Three days later, on 18th January 2015, the Director of Media and Publicity of the PDP Presidential Campaign Organization, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode, issued a statement calling on Buhari to clear the air on issues surrounding his health. “We would prefer that General Buhari clears the air and tell Nigerians that he is not mortally ill. The rumour that he is suffering from prostate cancer is exceptionally worrying and it is incumbent upon each and every one of us to pray for him if this rumour is true. In this day and age, nothing ought to be swept under the carpet. We are therefore constrained to urge him to prove to Nigerians that he is really as fit as a fiddle by taking a brisk walk.”

Apparently in response to that challenge, Buhari on the same day dismissed speculations about his health, and accused the PDP of desperation. “I was at Nasarawa and Benue states yesterday; tomorrow, I am going to be in two states; the day after tomorrow, in two more states. I am doing two states per day. How they got the impression that I was sick I do not know, although I got cold and that did not stop me from going through my schedule,” Buhari said in an address to the media in Abuja.

Barely 24 hours later, Ekiti State Governor, Mr Ayo Fayose, raised the stakes by placing a front page advert in some national newspapers, where he surmised that there was a real likelihood that Buhari as president could ‘repeat history’ of former Nigerian leaders that died while in office. The title of the advert was “Nigerians Be Warned” followed by “Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of State Burials.”

The advert, which angered many Nigerians, had the portrait of General Murtala Muhammed, General Sani Abacha and Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar’Adua – past Nigerian leaders who died in office. Fayose concluded the advert by quoting from the Bible – Deuteronomy 30 vs 19, “I call heaven and earth to

record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

While Fayose came under intense criticism for the advert, he had also successfully brought to public attention the issue of Buhari’s health. But by then the mood of the nation and the international community was for a change of government in Nigeria. Indeed, nothing summed up that mood better than the unprecedented 7th February 2015 endorsement of Buhari by ‘The Economist’ titled, “The Least Awful” with the rider, “A former dictator is a better choice than a failed president.”

The Economist concluded, “We are relieved not to have a vote in this election. But were we offered one, we would – with a heavy heart – choose Mr Buhari. Mr Jonathan risks presiding over Nigeria’s bloody fragmentation. If Mr Buhari can save Nigeria, history might even be kind to him.”

[68](#) Fashola is currently the Minister for Works, Housing and Power.

[69](#) Dasuki is currently in detention while facing trials for allegedly taking from the treasury hundreds of billions of Naira to fund President Jonathan’s re-election campaigns.

[70](#) The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a combined multinational formation, comprising military units from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria. It is headquartered in N’Djamena with a mandate to bring an end to the Boko Haram insurgency.

[71](#) Akpabio is now a Senator and the Minority (PDP) Leader.

[72](#) Tambuwal is the current Governor of Sokoto State.

[73](#) Mimiko was then Governor of Ondo State while Okorocha is current Governor of Imo State. Ngilari had at the time also become Governor of Adamawa State following the impeachment of Governor Murtala Nyako and after winning the legal tussle with House of Assembly Speaker, Hon. Adamu Umaru Fintiri, who had practically usurped the position in controversial circumstances.

[74](#) Interview granted the AFP by Dasuki, published on 9th February 2015.

[75](#) In a national broadcast on 14th May, 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a State of Emergency in the three Nigerian states of Adamawa, Yobe and Borno. While invoking Section 305, Sub section 1 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria which empowered him to take the action, Jonathan stated that the governors in the three states would remain in office.

[76](#) President Buhari's Special Assistant on Media and Publicity, Mallam Garba Shehu, said only the promises contained in the party's manifesto and constitution matter, dismissing the others.

[77](#) The promises were collated from the APC policy document and manifesto, Buhari's 100 days' covenant and speeches made at campaign rallies and town hall meetings nationwide in the course of the 2015 campaigns and published by TheCable.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE BALLOT AND THE DAY AFTER

By the beginning of 2015, it was not only in the North that Jonathan had serious problems; he was also very unpopular in the South-West, where he made several campaign stops before the election, but by then it was too late. “We ensured our engagement with the social media was effective by articulating our positions very clearly,” said former Army Chief and head of security for the Buhari Campaign, Lt General Abdulrahman Dambazau. “We also engaged the international community because of the apprehension that even if Jonathan lost, he would not go. The international community helped to pile pressure.”

That the APC engagement with the social media was effective was not in doubt as the party promised all manner of things that were not interrogated. On a few instances when questions were asked as to where Buhari would get the financial resources to fund projects, the usual retort was that once he “fought corruption”, there would be money to implement the promises, which included reviving all refineries in the first one year in office, building more for our domestic consumption, stabilising the value of the naira and fighting corruption.

With the tag of corruption stuck to his administration, aside from the mismanagement of the Boko Haram insurgency, most especially the abduction of the Chibok girls, the Jonathan government had demonstrated poor leadership and capability. The odds were therefore very much against the re-election of a President whose officials became increasingly reckless in the manner public resources were being deployed. Therefore, by the time the election was rescheduled from 14th February to 28th March, most credible opinion polls were already calling it for the opposition.

However, the postponement of the election had aroused suspicions about Jonathan's intentions and the neutrality of the military and security leaders were in serious doubt. To add to the mix were apprehensions concerning the introduction of the new card reader technology. Test runs of the card readers in a mock election held by INEC had revealed some flaws with recognition of permanent voters' cards (PVC's) and biometric confirmation of potential voters.

The PDP voiced more concern about the use of this new technology than the opposition party, going by statements from its National Publicity Secretary, Mr Olisa Metuh and Media Director for the Jonathan Campaign, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode. There were also protests from Ekiti State Governor, Mr Ayo Fayose who accused INEC of harbouring a sinister agenda.

In the weeks preceding the election, the Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Mr Mohammed Bello Adoke (SAN), had to issue a statement to denounce insinuations about an Interim National Government (ING) being credited to the administration. "While I recognize and appreciate the inalienable right of Nigerians to freely express themselves and proffer solutions to perceived national challenges, I am deeply concerned that some undiscerning Nigerians are being unwittingly led to believe that a certain prescription, which is totally alien to the Constitution, can be adopted as viable solution to our national challenges," he made clear.

Despite that assurance, there were still apprehensions which did not escape the attention of the international community. Six days to the election, the United States Embassy in Nigeria posted a video on YouTube of President Obama speaking directly to Nigerian citizens on the election. He started by reminding Nigerians about their struggle for independence from colonialism as well as the struggle against military dictatorship. "Now you have a historic opportunity to help write the next chapter of Nigeria's progress – by voting in the upcoming elections. For elections to be credible, they must be free, fair and peaceful. All

Nigerians must be able to cast their votes without intimidation or fear. So I call on all leaders and candidates to make it clear to their supporters that violence has no place in democratic elections – and that they will not incite, support or engage in any kind of violence – before, during, or after the votes are counted. I call on all Nigerians to peacefully express your views and to reject the voices of those who call for violence,” said Obama.

Successful elections and democratic progress, according to the then United States President, “will help Nigeria meet the urgent challenges you face today. Boko Haram – a brutal terrorist group that kills innocent men, women and children – must be stopped. Hundreds of kidnapped children deserve to be returned to their families. Nigerians who have been forced to flee deserve to return to their homes.”

Meanwhile, in the lead up to the election, Dame Patience Jonathan acted as the chief campaigner for her husband. But most of what she said rebounded negatively on the President, especially in the North. First, she caused a national uproar when she described Buhari as “brain-dead.” Speaking at the PDP Women Presidential Campaign Rally in Lokoja, the Kogi State capital, Dame Patience Jonathan said in Pidgin English, “*Wetin him (Buhari) dey find again? Him dey drag with him pikin mate. Old man wey no get brain, him brain don die pata pata*” (What does Buhari want again? He is jostling for power with someone young enough to be his son. Old man whose brain is completely dead!).

Fani-Kayode, would further amplify the statement. “The First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan, was absolutely right. To say that General Buhari is ‘brain dead’ is an understatement and to suggest that he is suffering from dementia is nothing new. The First Lady has spoken in a courageous and forthright manner and, most important of all, she has spoken the bitter truth. Instead of crying like spoilt little brats and complaining, the APC and the Buhari Campaign Organisation should live with that bitter truth and leave her alone.”

In hindsight, many PDP leaders believe Jonathan's wife did incalculable damage to the aspiration of Jonathan through her utterances in the course of the campaigns. According to Aliyu, the way Dame Patience Jonathan kept insulting the North made it difficult for people to openly identify with the PDP for fear of being attacked. For instance, three weeks to the election, Dame Patience Jonathan said people from the region usually dump children on the streets. *"Our People no dey born children wey dem no dey count. Our men no dey born children throway for street; we no dey like the people from that side"*, she said, in an apparent reference to the concept of the 'Almajiri'⁷⁸ that is common in the North.

While Dame Patience Jonathan was provocative, Mrs Aisha Buhari's emergence on the campaign trail had won huge support for her husband. In a riposte to Dame Jonathan, she said, "The wife of the President is supposed to be a mother to all Nigerians, regardless of political affiliation. So, for her to say northerners are Almajiris who beg for alms is sad. What is disturbing Patience is the large size of the North and we thank God for our population."

Young, beautiful and educated, it was difficult for many to associate Buhari – who had been presented in the austere image of a 'Taliban' – with such a charming wife. And the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Bachelor's degree holder in Public Administration helped to reshape the image of Buhari in the minds of many Nigerians, especially in the South. She also became a darling of the social media where she was being compared and contrasted with Dame Patience Jonathan whose stock had gone down considerably.

Amaechi admitted that Buhari was very reluctant to allow his wife join the campaign trail, but the moment she joined became the turning point. "We kept pushing and the moment she came out, you saw how she helped to galvanise support by debunking some false stereotypes being sold by the PDP at the time." Buhari exhibited the same reluctance in the media make-over that saw him take photographs in different Nigerian attires. "It was something we felt

we needed to do because in this age, politics is about both substance and style. At a point, I had to go to him to say, ‘Sir, you appointed me to run your campaign. If you want me to succeed, you have to play by the rules that will make us win. I need you for a photo-shoot’. It took a while but after so much pressure, he agreed and we had the photographs that were well-received,” Amaechi said.

The brickbats were coming at a time when Jonathan himself acknowledged that his re-election was going to be tough. Speaking on the “Kakaaki” programme on the Africa Independent Television (AIT), Jonathan said the opposition was more formidable than it was in 2011 because the defectors from the PDP were strengthening their ranks. “For one reason or the other, within the party, people get angry and may even vote against PDP, but in terms of membership, there is no party that has PDP’s spread. Even the opposition will tell you if they’re realistic. Who has strengthened the opposition? If you remove the PDP elements from the opposition, they will just crumble like a pack of cards,” the President surmised.

As the election approached, it was evident that the two parties were evenly matched. And given the fear that the election might end up in violence, there were several interventions by critical stakeholders. With support from the MacArthur Foundation, the Savannah Centre for Diplomacy, Democracy and Development (SCDDD) founded by Prof. Ibrahim Gambari constituted “The Council of the Wise” on 22nd December 2014. The Centre inaugurated a panel of eminent Nigerians of sufficient credibility and clout to broker peace across the country, including between the President and his main challenger.

Chaired by former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Mohammed Lawal Uwais with Gambari as coordinator, other members included: Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Madam Joke Silva, Amb. Brownson Dede, Sheikh Ahmad Abubakar Lemu, Prof. George Obiozor, Dr Agwu Okali and Amb. Gaji Usman Galtimairi. The Centre held several stakeholders meetings across

Nigeria and secured the commitments of many of the principal actors in the bid to ensure peace before, during and after the election.

At about the same period, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, and former Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, were guests at a workshop in Abuja where both Jonathan and Buhari met and embraced. The occasion was also attended by the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman, Adamu Mu'azu and the All Progressives Congress (APC) Chair, John Odigie Oyeogun who equally embraced each other in a gesture of peace.

The most important symbolic gesture happened a day to the election, when the two leading candidates restated their commitment towards a peaceful and violence-free exercise by signing a fresh accord. The non-violence pact followed a similar one Jonathan and Buhari had signed a month earlier alongside nine presidential standard bearers of other political parties in Abuja, where they committed themselves to free, credible and violence-free elections.

Given the fear of violence in the country at the time, the Special Adviser to the President on Inter-Party Affairs, Senator Ben Obi had succeeded in getting the political parties together for a meeting in January 2015 to commit to a pact. Dubbed 'The Abuja Accord', the agreement was to run issue-based campaigns while refraining from "making or causing to make in our names or that of our party, any public statements, pronouncements, declarations or speeches that have the capacity to incite any form of violence, before, during and after the elections."

The conference was chaired by Anyaoku, who thereafter approached Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah to help bring together a team of respected Nigerians to midwife the process under the auspices of The Kukah Centre. It was Kukah who invited former Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, to chair the National Peace Committee on the election.

With Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe (retd.) as Vice Chairman, other members were: the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Cardinal John Onaiyekan; the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar III; President, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor; President/CEO, Dangote Group, Alhaji Aliko Dangote; Primate, Anglican Communion of Nigeria, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh; former Deputy Vice Chancellor, Nasarawa State University, Professor Zaynab Alkali; publisher of Vanguard Newspapers, Mr Sam Amuka Pemu; former President, Nigerian Bar Association, Dame Priscilla Kuye; former Deputy Secretary General, United Nations, Professor Ibrahim Gambari; and former External Affairs Minister, Professor Bolaji Akinyemi. Kukah, of course, served as the convener.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the committee were: to observe and monitor compliance with The Abuja Accord signed by the political parties on 14th January 2015, provide advice to the government and INEC on resolution of political disputes and conflicts arising from issues of compliance with the 'Accord', and make itself available for national mediation and reconciliation in the case of post-electoral disputes or crises.

However, following the rescheduling of the election from 14th February to 28th March and the acrimonious nature of the campaigns, Kukah invited the committee members to Abuja on the week of the election, so they could meet with the two presidential candidates to get them to re-commit to the agreement. While the initial plan was to have both Buhari and Jonathan present at a meeting at The Villa, the APC candidate was on the campaign trail on that day and could not be reached.

As Kukah would explain to me, it was fortuitous that the committee did not succeed in bringing the two together on the first day. Kukah recollected that, "In the meeting we had at The Villa with President Jonathan, it was obvious that if General Buhari was present, we would not have achieved anything because he spent the time laying out his complaints against the opposition. By

the time we succeeded in getting General Buhari to meet with us at very short notice at Sheraton Hotel the next morning, he also spent considerable time laying his allegations against the government.”

After that meeting, Buhari, who had read the content of the peace accord pledge, said he was ready to sign, provided the government would guarantee a free and fair election. Kukah, on a brainwave, decided to reach people close to Jonathan to persuade him to alter his planned trip to Delta State that morning. The idea was to have him come to Sheraton where Buhari had also been prevailed upon to wait. Eventually, the committee got Jonathan who agreed to the idea of a meeting with Buhari at Sheraton. Kukah then mailed to presidential spokesman Dr Reuben Abati the draft statement, with a plea that Jonathan should read it ahead of the meeting.

After a short session of the Peace Committee at which Jonathan and Buhari expressed their concerns and a common ground was found, they also agreed to sign the peace accord. Speaking to the media before the signing ceremony, General Abubakar said his committee had been working round the clock to assist the parties and Nigerians to ensure that there was peace and harmony before, during and after the elections.

The contents of the accord were read out by Kukah who quoted the two candidates as restating their commitment to ensuring that the elections were held in a peaceful and violence-free atmosphere. Titled, “Renewal of Our Pledges to Peaceful Elections,” the statement, jointly signed by Jonathan and Buhari with Abubakar as the third signatory, said, “You may recall that on January 14, 2015, both of us, along with nine other party leaders signed what has now come to be known as the Abuja Accord. The substance of that Accord was our commitment to free, fair and credible elections in our dear country.

“In the Accord, we agreed to, among other things, run an issue-based campaign and pledged that our electoral campaigns will not involve any religious incitement, ethnic or tribal profiling, both by ourselves and all agents

acting in our names.

“Now that the campaigns have come to an end, we meet today to renew our pledge for peaceful elections. We therefore call on all fellow citizens of our dear country, and our party supporters, to refrain from violence or any acts that may in any way jeopardise our collective vision of a free, fair and credible election.

“In addition, we call on INEC and all security agencies to ensure strict adherence to their constitutional roles. We also pledge to respect the outcome of free, fair and credible elections. Today, we again renew our commitment to a united, democratic and prosperous Nigeria. We want all Nigerians to stand together at this critical phase of our nation’s history.”

Speaking after the signing, Buhari said all the agencies, including security and INEC, should work in line with the country’s constitution. Asked if he would accept the outcome of the elections, whichever way, he snapped, “How can we give such guarantee? I said (you should) read the accord we signed, it said ‘under free, fair and credible election’, which is the caveat.”

On 28th March, the election started on a somewhat ominous note as the INEC website was taken over by hackers who called themselves “Team Nigerian Cyber Army”. The website was replaced with a vague and threatening message warning INEC not to rig elections. The website was eventually restored hours later. Offline in the real world, security was airtight and the streets were empty, due to a nationwide restriction on vehicular movement.

By 8:30 am, Nigerians had started shuffling out to their various polling units for accreditation. It didn’t take long for the flaws exposed during the mock elections to reoccur at various polling units. There were glitches with accrediting President Jonathan and his wife, which was watched live by thousands of Nigerians. Other logistical issues also caused delays in a few

parts of the country, prompting INEC to extend the voting exercise into the next day, Sunday, 29th March. Voting had to be extended in 300 of the 150,000 polling units nationwide. There were very few pockets of insecurity around the country, apart from the hotbed of the war against Boko Haram in the North-East. There were also reports of electoral violence emanating mainly from Rivers State.

While the card reader worked well in most parts of the country, according to Jega's special adviser, Prof. Mohammed Kuna, the majority of the complaints came from the South-South geo-political zone, Jonathan's base, which raised suspicions. "From the reports from the situation room, we knew the card readers were working well except in the South-South and there could be reasons. One, there was outright dislike for the use of card readers by some people. Two, authenticating could be a problem. On the whole, if you examine the pattern of results, you will see that the figures are more credible than what we had in the past" – was Kuna's overview.

By the end of the first day of voting, results from polling units were being splashed on social media. Jonathan reportedly lost to Buhari at the Presidential Villa polling units, which many especially in the opposition camp took as worthy indication of the electorate's disenchantment with the incumbent. By the next morning, Sunday, 29th March 2015, there was an early warning from INEC on unofficial declaration of results, given all that had been flying around on social media. Nevertheless, unofficial results continued to circulate until voting officially closed nationwide at about 7pm. The nation gradually bubbled back to life, as Nigerians were now free to go about their regular business after the restriction of movement had been lifted.

Collation of results had barely started at the state level in the late hours of Sunday when the Director of Media and Publicity for PDP Campaign declared that the PDP was winning in 23 states. INEC quickly dismissed Fani-Kayode's statement by clarifying that collation had been concluded in only two states at

the time and those were Ogun and Ekiti. And in those two states, honours were split even, with Buhari sweeping Ogun State and Jonathan victorious in Ekiti State.

The national collation of results was scheduled by INEC to kick off Monday 30th March at 12 noon in Abuja. Both sides appealed to their supporters to remain calm and watchful to allow INEC fulfil its responsibilities. Preliminary results from state collation centres continued to filter through to the public and unofficial vote count from North-West region and the South-West were encouraging for the APC candidate. The final collation and announcement of results started two hours later than scheduled and at the end of Day One, results from 18 states and the FCT had been announced, with Muhammad Buhari in the lead with more than two million votes.

The exercise resumed Tuesday 31st March around 11am and not long after, one of the PDP agents at the venue and former Minister of the Niger Delta, Elder Godsdag Orubebe, called the attention of Jega to some of his party's concerns. At this point, the APC was still in the lead but the PDP had closed the gap to about 500,000 votes after the announcement of Rivers State results. But there were 11 States still to go.

Orubebe was duly obliged by Jega and handed a microphone to have his say. He started off calmly by expressing his displeasure with the Chairman's dismissal of his party's petition against the APC. Then he went on to accuse Jega of being partial in his handling of the election. Before anyone knew what was going on, the accusations and tone swiftly escalated into a full blown tantrum directed at the INEC Chairman. "We are not going to take it. We are not going to take it" Orubebe said repeatedly.

Proceedings had now been disrupted and Nigerians witnessed the chaos live on national TV as security operatives scrambled timidly to retrieve the microphone from Orubebe's grasp and press cameras fluttered all around. Orubebe was joined by other PDP agents as he planted himself defiantly on the

high stage where INEC officials were seated, vowing not to allow the announcement continue until Jega left the venue and their concerns were addressed. “Go to your office!” Orubebe kept shouting.

All through the pandemonium, Jega maintained exceptional composure. For a while he had his phone to his ear almost like he was receiving instructions or advice on how best to handle the situation that had become tricky. Then he strategically picked his moment to respond calmly but emphatically by addressing Orubebe’s allegations in detail.

Jega rounded up his response by admonishing Orubebe to be mindful of his utterances and public conduct as a former minister and a statesman. Jega’s calm and collected demeanour won him applause from the audience and the respect of many Nigerians. After Orubebe’s shenanigans had been tactfully defused, the announcements continued with Buhari’s lead widening after 30 states.

With only six states left to be declared, three of them Sokoto, Borno and Yobe which were expected to go the Buhari way, with Edo and Taraba as toss ups, leaving only Delta as Jonathan’s stronghold, it was evident the election had been lost and won. APC supporters around the country had started revving up their celebrations and Buhari’s emergence as winner looked like a foregone conclusion.

But Nigerians were still anxious. Bearing in mind that no opposition party had ever been able to successfully replace the government in power at the centre throughout our national existence, no one could be certain of what would happen next.

While the uncertainties in the country were palpable, the interest of the international community in the election was very much evident. In the course of collation of results, there were warnings from the US and UK foreign secretaries that the process was subject to “political interference”. That was

because the APC had engaged the international community well ahead of the election. “We had information that there were people in government who had prepared their minds that even if they lost the election; they would not allow the president to hand over power. But aside some western countries, the General Abdulsalami peace committee also helped”, Dambazau explained.

What happened next came as a surprise to everyone in Nigeria and around the world. News broke that Jonathan had called Buhari to concede the election and congratulate him on his victory. And quite naturally, the country exploded in jubilations. It was the first time in history that an African nation had experienced such a magnanimous act of statesmanship.

The final results were eventually announced by INEC Chairman Attahiru Jega at about 3am on Wednesday, 1st April 2015. Muhammadu Buhari was declared winner of the election and President-elect of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

[78](#) In Nigeria, Almajiri is a child or young adult with no formal education who ekes out a living by begging for alms on the streets.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A WEB OF CONSPIRACIES?

In March 2014, twelve northern governors and one deputy governor were in the United States where they held sessions with senior officials of President Barack Obama's administration, including National Security Adviser, Ms Susan Rice. Organised by the US Institute for Peace, the aim of the visit was how the Americans could work together with the northern states to address the Boko Haram insurgency and the socio-economic challenges in the region arising from it.

However, Dr Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu, Chairman of the Northern Governors Forum confided that in retrospect, he had a feeling the American authorities invited them not just because of Boko Haram, but also to use them as a sounding board for the 2015 presidential election. "I have no proof of course, but I think the idea was to ascertain what the disposition of the North would be to the idea of another term for President Jonathan. That was my reading of the situation. I believe it was all about the 2015 election for which the Americans had resolved not to support Jonathan. They just wanted to size us up for the level of commitment to regime change," Aliyu told me.

In one of the sessions, Adamawa Governor, Murtala Nyako, accused the Jonathan administration of being the brains behind Boko Haram, to destroy the North. Even though the startling accusation caused the late Prof. Ade Adefuye, the then Nigerian ambassador to the United States, to respond angrily, Nyako refused to back down. "That would have signalled to the Americans that the North would not accept Jonathan in 2015 and they bought into the project." In Aliyu's summation, "If Jonathan had been clever enough to say he would not run and had stuck with the PDP zoning formula by supporting a young northern candidate, I am almost certain Buhari would have shelved his ambition to

contest in 2015, knowing there was no way he would win.”

While the former Niger governor may not have been certain of his hunch about the disposition of the Obama administration towards the aspiration of Jonathan for a second-term, the former president himself was under no illusions about it. “President Barack Obama and his officials made it very clear to me by their actions that they wanted a change of government in Nigeria and were ready to do anything to achieve that purpose. They even brought some naval ships into the Gulf of Guinea in the days preceding the election,” said Jonathan, who went into some detail about the extent that the then American president went to undermine him before the election.

Applying the law introduced by Senator Patrick Leahy in 1997 on the primacy of human rights record in military operations, the Obama administration blocked the sale of arms to Nigeria not only from America but also their allies. That, quite naturally, made the war against Boko Haram very difficult. Explaining the rationale for the decision, the then American Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr James Entwistle, said the human rights situation was key. “As we look at equipment transfers, we look at the situation in those countries in the past few years. And as you all know, there have been instances (I’m not saying across the board) of human rights abuses by the Nigerian military in the North-East”⁷⁹.

In November 2014, the Nigerian government halted the US training of its soldiers to fight Boko Haram. “At the request of the Nigerian government, the United States will discontinue its training of a Nigerian Army battalion,” the US Embassy in Abuja said in a statement. Two initial phases of training had already been completed between April and August of that year which provided “previously untrained civilian personnel with basic soldiering skills,” while a third session had been planned “with the intent of developing the battalion into a unit with advanced infantry skills.”

The decision, according to a top military officer, was taken because “it

made no sense for them to be training our officers and men and refuse to sell to us the necessary arms to fight. Were we expected to fight with our bare arms? I believe President Jonathan was correct in putting a halt to the hypocritical nonsense.”

However, it was not only on the military front that the Obama administration was checkmating Jonathan; it did so on the diplomatic front too, according to the former president, who related some of his observations, “I got on very well with Prime Minister David Cameron but at some point, I noticed that the Americans were putting pressure on him and he had to join them against me. But I didn’t realize how far President Obama was prepared to go to remove me until France caved in to the pressure from America.”

The former president disclosed that he had such a good relationship with Mr Francois Hollande that whenever there were difficulties with Cameroon over the Boko Haram issue, it was the French president he reached out to. On one occasion, following an appeal by Jonathan, Hollande even organised a conference in Paris with all the French speaking countries within the sub-region. “But weeks to the election, he had also joined the Americans in supporting the opposition against me,” Jonathan noted.

There are questions as to what point the Obama administration decided to oppose Jonathan whose ascension to office they had supported. So chummy was the relationship that David Mark recounted to me how Jonathan caused a delay in the passage of the Same-Sex Marriage Bill in Nigeria because of Obama, “President Jonathan called me that President Obama had sent to him a message of concerns about the bill. That was in 2012 at a time Obama was seeking a second-term in office,” Mark recalled. “President Jonathan asked what could be done and I told him that not only was I committed to the passage of the bill, that was also the position of the National Assembly. I said the only thing I could do was delay its passage till after the American presidential election. But I assured him that same-sex marriage was not something we

would legalise in Nigeria. We delayed it for a few months after that, but we eventually passed the bill into law and President Jonathan had to assent.”

By 2014, it had become clear the Obama administration wanted a regime change in Nigeria. Asked what the contention was with the Americans, Jonathan said the only issue Obama administration officials kept harping upon was the allegation of corruption in his government. “There was this blanket accusation that my body language was supporting corruption, a line invented by the opposition but which the media and civil society bought into and helped to project to the world. That was the same thing I kept hearing from the Americans without specific allegations.”

To the extent that it was not only the Americans that were worried by the disposition of the Jonathan administration to issues of corruption, I asked him why he refused to deal with the problem. He replied that when it comes to the issue of graft, majority of Nigerians, especially those with access to the media, love hypocrisy, something he had vowed never to be part of. He would only say, “By virtue of being President of Nigeria, I have come to know so many things about so many people. Some of the most corrupt Nigerians are the ones who speak most loudly about corruption. Once you have access to the media in Nigeria, you have the liberty to accuse others of corruption regardless of what you are doing”. Jonathan opined that what those who romanticize the issue forget is that “when you destroy your country, you are also destroying yourself.”

On the refusal to publicly declare his assets, one of the issues seized upon by the opposition to demonise him, Jonathan was adamant that it was a matter of conviction. “I remember I told the late President Yar’Adua that it was wrong to declare our assets publicly and I explained why. I told him that the drafters of the law knew what they were doing when they wrote the provisions the way they did, such that assets of public officials have to include that of their spouses. Imagine a business man whose wife was invited into government

and she has to declare their (hers and husband's) assets publicly. I told him that what the law required was to declare and those who have questions can then apply the same law to find out," Jonathan said.

He accused the media of bias and pandering to the opposition without applying the same standards to the Buhari administration. Citing an example of such bias, Jonathan noted that, "The same media and civil society that attacked me kept quiet when President Buhari refused to make public his assets declaration form as he promised. In my own case, I was attacked for not doing what I never promised."

Jonathan believes the campaign against him on the issue of corruption was whipped up by some people in the media and civil society who just wanted drama. "I have been told that I should have made scapegoats of some officials so I would be seen to be fighting corruption but that for me is not right. When I get reports about corruption, I usually subject them to investigations," he pointed out.

To demonstrate that he fought corruption, Jonathan referred to the case of his former Aviation Minister. "You know Stella Oduah played a prominent role in my campaign in 2011. But when the investigation I ordered was carried out and the indictment was confirmed, I had to relieve her of her position," said Jonathan, who added that he applied the same principle to Prof. Barth Nnaji at the Ministry of Power over what he described as conflict of interest. "Up till today, Stella hates me for her removal. No doubt, it was a very hard decision for me to take because I see her as a friend as I take all the people who work for me, but that was what leadership demanded."

Reminded of the many allegations of corruption under his administration that he refused to deal with, especially in the oil and gas sector, Jonathan dismissed them as nothing more than rumour peddling which many Nigerians revel in, "We live in a country where people fabricate stories about even those they don't know and where rumour mongering is a national pastime. I have

heard stories about me that I find very shocking, stories that are untrue. Therefore, as a leader, it is my responsibility to verify stories before I act. That is why I am deliberative in what I do. The main problem I had was that the media and the civil society had conspired against me.”

A good example of that conspiracy, according to Jonathan, was the way his statement on stealing and corruption became “another weapon against me”. He said the background to the issue was a meeting he called to discuss an institutional way to deal with corruption in Nigeria. “I invited the leadership of the National Assembly and the Judiciary as well as heads of anti-corruption agencies. I recall that aside the Chief Justice of Nigeria, the President of the Court of Appeal and Chief Judge of the Federal High Court (were also present). I also invited Chief Judges from one state in each of the six geopolitical zones. I specifically requested for Lagos and Anambra to represent their zones. My choosing Anambra was because that is one state where every political aspirant goes into election with at least two court orders in his pocket. You cannot fight corruption without dealing with such issues,” Jonathan insisted.

The former president said that, during the meeting, the CJN mentioned that 80 percent of the cases in court that were being branded as issues of corruption were actually cases of theft that should not be given political colouration. “That was what the then CJN said which I was explaining, but the opposition latched on to it. A prominent member of the opposition who is now a governor of his state even sponsored someone to write a book titled, ‘Where stealing is not corruption’. The book was supposed to be launched in the days preceding the election though for some reasons, that never took place but I have a copy of the book where I was lampooned and called all sorts of names”.

According to the former President, he was never in denial about the challenge of corruption, but rather that he was concerned about how to deal with the problem. “That was what was important to me. I would not go outside

the country and say Nigerians are the most corrupt people because not only is that unhelpful, I am also indicting myself. Take the oil industry. We commissioned a report which I believe this administration is using. It deals with undervaluation of the crude oil and gas being declared between what was lifted and what was discharged by the vessels. It was a comprehensive report that dealt with the issue of oil theft in Nigeria and how much we lose as a result of it.”

Asked about the allegations of corruption against his Petroleum Minister, Mrs Diezani Alison-Madueke, Jonathan dismissed them as unfounded. “Look at what we did when the allegations became strident. We established four committees to investigate different aspects of the oil and gas sector, including the one headed by Nuhu Ribadu⁸⁰. If I had anything to hide, would I do that?”

The report of the Ribadu Committee, which indicted the administration, was never implemented. When reminded of that, Jonathan said there was no conclusive report. “On the day the report was being submitted, there was open disagreement between Ribadu and Steve Oronsaye⁸¹. How could we use a report that was discredited by its own member?” asked Jonathan.

According to the former President, the accusations of corruption against him are largely unfair, particularly against the background of his government’s achievements. A defiant Jonathan defended his track record, saying, “I am from Niger Delta, I have no single oil block and my government never gave out any nor did we allocate the marginal fields. In the agriculture sector, I blocked the fertilizer trade. These are areas one could make easy money and I blocked those loopholes. Yet, people make all the noise about corruption. If the problem is that I failed to label Nigerians as fantastically corrupt, then I don’t think I should apologise for that.”

Another issue for which Jonathan came under heavy criticism was his administration’s handling of the Boko Haram insurgency. “What is happening

now with regards to Boko Haram was the same thing that happened to me regarding Niger Delta militants in 2007,” he began. “I did my best and so did the military though I can understand if there is greater commitment to the fight now than in the past. In my time, Boko Haram said they were fighting an infidel government. That naturally has to change since they cannot also call Buhari an infidel. There is a feeling of ‘our man is there now’ that you cannot discountenance. It was the same feeling with me with the Niger Delta militants at the initial stage in 2007,” said Jonathan, who remarked that those using Boko Haram against him are simply looking for excuses.

Responding to the accusation, especially by Obasanjo, that he never took the Boko Haram challenge seriously, Jonathan queried whether his predecessor ever asked himself why he was unable to solve the Niger Delta problem. “I recall that immediately he won the election in 1999, before he was even sworn in, Obasanjo had visited Niger Delta to hold meetings. Meanwhile, the first time I would be meeting Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom and other militants was years later in Aso Rock at a meeting (Obasanjo) called to find a solution to the problem at a period I was Deputy Governor in Bayelsa State. Despite all those efforts, Obasanjo failed to resolve the problem until the late Yar’Adua came with the Amnesty Programme. Should we then hold Obasanjo accountable for the Niger Delta problem?”

While Jonathan may advance some justifications for the difficulty of tackling the Boko Haram insurgency, another issue that riled many Nigerians, and which the opposition used to campaign against him, was the manner in which he managed the abduction of the Chibok girls. However, the former President declared that, “The allegation that I didn’t care was false. Immediately I was alerted, I called the military and security chiefs for a briefing after tasking them to get to the root of the matter. Information was initially hazy and there were things that did not add up.”

Jonathan does not seem able to resolve some questions about the incident in

his own mind. “More than 200 girls were reportedly abducted from different hostels and then put on an open trailer that had no railings. In the same trailer, according to reports, Boko Haram fighters loaded foodstuff. The girls were said to have been abducted by people claiming to be soldiers. The military people were on ground and I relied on the information I could get from them. Of course I cared and charged them to find the girls but every effort we took was twisted against me to score cheap political points,” he said emphatically.

Another accusation against Jonathan which he described as most unfair was the perceived “Ijawisation” of the Nigerian polity during his administration, a charge he strongly disputed, “That is the same accusation President Obasanjo leveled against me in his letter. In my memoir, I am going to reveal the nature of my relationship with President Obasanjo, beginning from 2007 when he nominated me to be running mate to the late President Yar’Adua to 2011 when I wanted to run and the real roles he actually played before, during and after the 2015 election.”

Defending himself against the accusation that he was playing Ijaw politics while in office, Jonathan responded with a poser, “How many Ijaw people were in my government?” He added, “One thing people forget is that Ijaw may be a minority ethnic group in Nigeria but Ijaw people actually straddle six states: Ondo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Edo, Cross River.”

Reminded that some of the people close to him, especially Chief Edwin Clark and Asari Dokubo, were rather vocal and provocative in their utterances, Jonathan wondered why he should be held responsible for that. “Okay, let us agree for the sake of argument that Chief Clarke and others were offensive, what about those from other ethnic groups who were also making incendiary statements about my person with insinuations about people who wear bowler hats? I am not defending whoever may have crossed the line among Ijaw people but let us be fair, why should I be held accountable for that and you would not hold other leaders accountable for what politicians from

their own ethnic groups also say?”

If there is one issue on which the former President has serious misgivings, it is in the conduct of the 2015 general election and the disposition of the then INEC National Chairman, Prof. Attahiru Jega, whose neutrality Jonathan calls to question. “I was disappointed by Jega because I still cannot understand what was propelling him to act the way he did in the weeks preceding the election. As at the first week in February 2015 when about 40 percent of Nigerians had not collected their PVCs, Jega said INEC was ready to go ahead with the election. How could INEC have been ready to conduct an election in which millions of people would be disenfranchised?”

According to Jonathan, even when he had a meeting with Jega to express his reservations about the preparedness of INEC, Jega was still adamant that they were ready and that the election would go ahead. “Of course the Americans were encouraging him to go ahead yet they would never do such thing in their own country. How could we have cynically disenfranchised about a third of our registered voters for no fault of theirs and still call that a credible election? The interesting thing was that the opposition also supported the idea of going on with an election that was bound to end in confusion.”

Jonathan, however, defended his government’s postponement of the election, maintaining that it was for security reasons. “When the military and security chiefs demanded for more time to deal with the insurgency, the reasons were genuine. As at February 2015, it would have been very difficult to vote in Gombe, Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States. But the moment all the arms and ammunition that had been ordered finally arrived, the military was able to use them to degrade the capacity of Boko Haram to the level in which they posed no threat to the election,” he explained.

On the huge sums of money allegedly taken by his National Security Adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki (retd.) in what has been dubbed in the media as the ‘Armagate’ scandal, the former President demurred, saying he would not

speak on it, since the matter was already before the court.

However, if there is anything that pains the former president, it is the way he says his wife and some officials of his administration are being treated by the Buhari administration. “I feel sad about the way my family is being hounded,” he lamented. “Society is like a building. You build it one block at a time. If every president decides to go in to dismantle what his predecessor did, society will never make progress. I expected President Buhari to correct whatever mistakes I may have made and then carry on from there. But a situation in which people go into exile for political reasons is not good for us.”

According to Jonathan, Buhari had a good opportunity to instil a new order with the anti-corruption campaign that brought him to power and which resonated during the campaign. “His style of fighting corruption is different from mine and since most Nigerians apparently prefer his style, it is okay. There are steps you take that will help in retrieving ill-gotten wealth and punish offenders while restoring confidence in the system. But there are also things you can do to damage the system.”

Having shared with me his own concise review of what transpired at the election, Jonathan said he had seen enough to convince him that even if he had been declared winner, the bond of trust had been broken between him and several people within his government. “I felt really betrayed by the results coming from some northern states. Perhaps for ethnic purposes, even security agents colluded with the opposition to come up with spurious results against me. You saw the way the Inspector General of Police, a man I appointed, suddenly turned himself into the ADC to Buhari immediately after the election.”

The former president said he had projections before both the 2011 and 2015 presidential elections and he was sure of what would happen in each of the zones yet could still not fathom what happened in some states in 2015. “How could we have lost Ondo, Benue and Plateau States if our people were

committed to the cause? If you examine the results, you will see a pattern: in places where ordinarily we were strong, our supporters did not show enough commitment to mobilize the voters.” Jonathan expressed disappointment at some former allies, naming some names. “What happened was very sad not for me as a person, but for our democracy,” he admitted. “Take for instance, the PDP National Chairman, Alhaji Adamu Mu’azu. I believe he joined in the conspiracy against me. For reasons best known to him, he helped to sabotage the election in favour of the opposition.”

For his part, Mu’azu told me in no uncertain terms that he found it difficult to believe that Jonathan would level such an allegation against him. The former PDP Chairman described any such suggestion as unkind and absolutely untrue, and vehemently denied claims of a conspiracy involving him in the election and its aftermath. “That President Jonathan would make the kind of imputation you ascribe to him is very unfortunate indeed,” Mu’azu told me. ‘It pains me that anybody would want to pin a tag of ethnic or religious bigotry on me because that is what President Jonathan means by his accusation even if he did not directly say it. I suppose my crime with him is that I am a Muslim and a northerner,” he said.

Hinting at his own side of the story, the former PDP National Chairman countered that some people wanted him to be abusive to Buhari during the campaign, as a show of loyalty to the PDP and its candidate. “But I was not brought up to be abusing people, especially respected elders with whom I have no personal problems,” Mu’azu insisted.

Recalling the state in which he met the PDP and the efforts he said he put in to change the fortunes of the party, Mu’azu expressed the confidence that the “majority of Nigerians will remember that I took over a party that was in shambles. Very quickly, I injected a new lease of life into the PDP for which I was hailed as the ‘Game Changer’. It is convenient to forget all that now. But in the build-up to the election, some people decided to introduce religion and

ethnicity into the campaign in such a manner that not only hurt the PDP in the North but was actually helping to mobilize our opponents against us.”

Mu’azu called on Jonathan to look inwards in order to get at the root of his failure at the polls in 2015, and went further to allege that the presidential campaign was mismanaged by those who thought that stigmatizing others would win votes for an incumbent. “There are things I do not want to reveal, but you at least remember something you wrote after the election, about a press conference I was supposed to address. Maybe that was the betrayal President Jonathan was referring to. How you got your story is still amazing for me, but it is largely true,” Mu’azu confirmed, unexpectedly bringing me into his narrative⁸².

He vowed to tell his own story one day, but for now, the former PDP Chairman is content to end on this note, “After President Jonathan had accepted defeat, congratulated Buhari and the whole world was acclaiming him, some of our party leaders now wanted me to make a statement that would ridicule me before civilized people and cause serious problems for our country. Of course, I refused to do any such thing. If that was the sabotage President Jonathan is referring to, I don’t think I should apologise for that.”

One major issue of contention that rocked the PDP leading up to the election was that by seeking a second-term, Jonathan was reneging on his much talked about pledge to spend only one term in office. The former president begged to differ.

Revisiting the statements he made in Addis Ababa in February 2011, which were taken to mean he had agreed to only one term, Jonathan said he was misinterpreted. “I had made a proposition for a single term of seven years. That was the context in which I spoke in Addis Ababa that if the idea was accepted, I would not run again. It was not in the context of a second-term of four years,” he explained. “Of course, at that period, the issue of one term was brought up several times at different meetings and some people took it upon

themselves to pledge on my behalf but I never said I was going to spend only one term... the question was always usually randomly asked and I never made any such commitment to anybody.”

Former Senate President David Mark and former Niger Governor Babangida Aliyu, have their own takes on how and why the election was won and lost. Mark’s viewpoint, “I was part of the 2011 campaign and to a large extent, I was also involved in the 2015 campaign and from my reading of the situation, President Jonathan was a bit tentative, almost as if he wasn’t certain about running. He didn’t seek the presidency with the kind of single-mindedness with which he pursued the ambition in 2011. It was almost as if President Jonathan couldn’t make up his mind as to whether or not to run so it came as no surprise to me that he lost.”

Aliyu on the other hand recalled that, with suspicion mounting that Jonathan was contemplating changing his mind on the one-term deal, PDP governors held meetings with him individually and as a group. Aliyu related his own direct experience, “As Chairman of the Northern Governors Forum, I recall having to remind him of the commitment he made to us in 2010 before we supported his bid to contest. I know that other governors were also meeting him while a few were seeing themselves as potential candidates. In one of my meetings with him, I suggested he could even choose any credible PDP man he wanted from the North and such a person did not have to be among the governors. One day, he would agree to the idea, another day, he would say something else.” Aliyu concluded that it was Jonathan’s own disposition that eventually galvanised the “Group of Seven Governors, even though we started as six when we had our first meeting in Saudi Arabia in the course of observing Umra (lesser Hajj). It was when we returned that we co-opted Amaechi⁸³ who was at serious loggerheads with Jonathan.”

On the position of the North, Mark contended that Jonathan should have seen the handwriting on the wall. “I saw it and at different times, I pointed out to

him and the party that the projections being made by some people around the president about what the voting pattern in the North would be were wrong. I could see the conspiracy and gang-up building up in the North against the aspiration of Jonathan but my voice was drowned out by those who took it for granted that a sitting president, and one from the PDP, could not lose.”

The former Senate President said only Vice President Namadi Sambo could see that Jonathan was not strong in the North but apparently had little say in the campaign. “Some people were deceiving the president with the kind of false scenarios they were painting for him. The VP could see the conspiracy but I don’t know how much influence he had on the campaign. Why Jonathan couldn’t see it until it was too late is what I find difficult to understand,” Mark said.

A final note on the much talked about one-term agreement that proved an Achilles heel, former President Goodluck Jonathan also had this to say, “In any case, you can make a political promise and change your mind, so long as it is within the law.”

[79](#) Mr Entwistle spoke in Yola, the Adamawa State capital, while answering questions from journalists during a working visit to the American University of Nigeria, AUN and was reported in Premium Times, 9th October, 2014.

[80](#) Founding Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

[81](#) Former Head of the Civil Service of the Federation and member of the panel that openly disagreed with Ribadu on the day the report was being submitted.

[82](#) I documented what transpired between Mu’azu and then Akwa Ibom Governor, Mr Godswill Akpabio and his Cross River State counterpart, Mr Liyel Imoke, in my column, “Inside The PDP Tower of Babel”, published in THISDAY on 7th May, 2015.

[83](#) Then Governor of Rivers State and Chair of the Nigeria Governors Forum at the time.

THE POSTSCRIPT

An ambitious man with enormous capacity for concealing his hand, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, to his eternal credit, successfully managed two critical transitions in Nigeria's political history: first, he took power after the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in May 2010 and second, he handed over to Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.) after he lost the March 2015 presidential election. On both occasions, Jonathan displayed uncommon political dexterity that helped the nation out of what could have been a deadly crisis.

Due to zonal politics that initially fuelled his ascension to power, and a lack of preparation that was so evident, Jonathan's presidency was not only prone to scandals but also to divisiveness. If he tried to placate the North, he would emerge as a traitor in some quarters. If he became an aggressive minority president, the majority nationalities would descend on him. The only option for survival therefore was to be a national leader and that was always going to be difficult in a milieu where politicians wear their ethnicity and religion as badges of honour. As it would happen, Jonathan chose to be a minority president; suffering from a psychology of perennial embattlement by spending most of his period in office as a hostage to power.

From the manner in which he handled his failed bid to install a Speaker for the House of Representatives in June 2011, to his inability to discern how much Nigerians detest leaders tainted with the brush of corruption, to the futile attempt to dabble into the Nigeria Governors Forum (NGF) Chairmanship election and how that eventually led to ill-will and a split within the ruling party, to the unfortunate Chibok '*Waka-Come*' theatrics and several other gaffes by his wife, Jonathan gave ample ammunition to the opposition to define him in a manner that left many to conclude that he was ill-suited for the job of

President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces.

On the part of the Electoral Commission, while the 2015 presidential election was not perfect, the conduct was much better than the previous ones because of the use of the card reader. And the results reflected the popular will. Therefore, all factors considered, Jonathan was not rigged out. He was defeated.

The outcome of the 2015 presidential election was predictable, because many Nigerians had resolved to vote, not necessarily for the opposition but rather against the incumbent President. So, in a way, a huge chunk of the votes that brought Buhari to power were a punishment to his predecessor for squandering the enormous goodwill that swept him into power. Interestingly, the failings of the past seem to be repeating themselves in bigger proportions today.

For sure, some APC leaders had their doubts about Buhari, but presenting someone else would most certainly have been a boon to Jonathan. So, the theory of anyone but Jonathan was fraught with risks that the opposition was not prepared to take. They needed a candidate that the incumbent could not bully, that had a solid electoral base, and could be positioned as the opposite of/alternative to the incumbent on the major issues of the day, especially corruption and insecurity. In the weeks preceding the election, most Nigerians were agreed Buhari perfectly fitted that bill.

Unfortunately, almost two years after the election, ill-health now seems to be defining the Buhari presidency. On 19th January 2017, for the third time within a period of eight months, President Buhari wrote to notify the National Assembly that he would be proceeding on vacation for 10 working days in the course of which he would temporarily transfer power to Vice President Yemi Osinbajo in compliance with Section 145 (1) of the 1999 Constitution. The statement by his Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Mr Femi Adesina, added that the President would, during the vacation, also undergo some

“routine medical check-up” before returning to resume work on Monday February 6. But the president did not return on the said date “based on doctors’ recommendation for further tests and rests”.

However, exactly 51 days after he left Nigeria, President Buhari returned from the United Kingdom on 10th March with question marks hanging over his health status. For instance, he has already hinted that he would still require “further follow-ups within some weeks” while Vice President Osinbajo will continue to play stand-in roles. Beyond the intrigues and geo-political arithmetic that often dominate the political space under such a situation as obtains in Nigeria today, it is also a treacherous route that offers no real comfort in terms of rule of law and good governance.

Indeed, there is something about the nature of the process (or lack of) that throws up most of our leaders that demands interrogation if we must deepen our democracy. In the case of Jonathan, for instance, on the two occasions he contested the presidency, the party’s choice was not based on any ideals, nor were there any contestation of ideas. In 2011, it was all about political geography, which favoured him⁸⁴. In 2015, the same factor favoured his opponent at a time PDP leaders merely conspired to make Jonathan the sole candidate in the bid to retain their personal privileges. In the end, that proved to be very costly.

Incidentally, when he contested for the first time in 2003 against Obasanjo on the platform of the defunct ANPP, Buhari garnered 12,710,022 votes representing 32.19 percent of total votes cast. In 2007 when it was a three-way battle with Atiku and the late Yar’Adua, Buhari got 6,605,299 votes representing 18.72 percent of total votes haul. At the 2011 poll where he contested on the platform of the CPC, he secured 12,214,853 votes representing 31.98 percent. In all these periods, Buhari’s campaigns were restricted largely to the North and he said nothing memorable. It was not until 2015 when he contested under a broad coalition of parties and an assortment of

political strange bed fellows that he eventually won with over 15 million votes.

Yet, with almost two years in power, there is nothing to suggest that Buhari is prepared for the office he spent 12 years campaigning for. The problem is even now compounded by the health challenge that could be the most dominant issue in the polity in the next two years, at a time when digging a way out of the current national economic challenge requires a leadership that is not in any way distracted. But then, the back stories of how Nigerian leaders have emerged since independence are somewhat similar in several respects.

In 1959, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became Nigeria's first Prime Minister simply because his party leader, who ordinarily should have occupied the position, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, was turned off by the idea of living in Lagos, so he ceded the office to his deputy. In 1979, during the Second Republic, Alhaji Shehu Shagari became the presidential candidate of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which went on to win the election after being pulled away from his senatorial ambition.

With the Third Republic scuttled by the military before it even got started, General Olusegun Obasanjo was in 1998 rescued from the prison cells to become the first President in the Fourth Republic, essentially to appease the agitations of the Yoruba people⁸⁵. Despite initially resisting the idea with a famous refrain – “how many president. will you make of me?” – Obasanjo went on to spend eight years in office. He was succeeded by the late Yar'Adua, who also never nurtured a presidential ambition until he was pulled into the race by Obasanjo.

Following Yar'Adua's death in May 2010, the presidency fell onto the lap of Goodluck Jonathan, who started out as Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State before the misfortune of his then boss⁸⁶ catapulted him to the governorship seat. In similar fashion, he moved from being Vice President to Acting

President and finally to becoming the President. So, the route to the presidency for Jonathan, in the Nigerian folklore, has more to do with his first name, Goodluck, than by any conscious efforts or preparations.

Today, we have Buhari whose emergence can be traced to three principal factors. One, he was a major beneficiary of the geo-political consensus that defines the presidency of Nigeria. Two, he had a fanatical support base in a section of the North that needed no campaign to mobilise. Three, tired of the inability of the incumbent to meet popular expectations even in simple matters, the majority of Nigerians were ready to try any alternative.

What the foregoing suggests clearly is that many Nigerian leaders almost always arrive their duty posts more by accident (and luck) than by any conscious dream nurtured by ideas or ideals. Yet to develop as a nation, we must begin to imbibe a culture by which those who aspire to lead our people are subjected to a rigorous process of public debates that will assess their suitability on objective criteria, rather than the religion they practise or where they come from. They would also need to be tested and scrutinised on the state of their health, elocution, education, knowledge of the world, etc. rather than rely on their “body language”.

After all is said, regardless of whether the expectations of Nigerians who voted “Change” are met or not, the enduring value of the 2015 elections cannot be wished away: an incumbent president can be defeated, even in Nigeria. That is an important lesson for the current incumbent and a lasting victory for the Nigerian people.

[84](#) There was a clamour that since nobody from the Niger Delta from where he hails had been president before, he should be allowed to run despite the fact that such arrangement was against the PDP zoning formula at the time.

[85](#) Following the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election (presumed to have been won by the late Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola) by the General Ibrahim Babangida military administration, there was a serious

agitation that for equity; the presidency of Nigeria would have to go to a southerner, preferably a Yorubaman like Abiola, in 1999. That was how the military contrived a process by which the two presidential candidates at the election were both Yoruba.

[86](#) His Governor, Alamiyeseigha was impeached in controversial circumstances upon returning to Nigeria after jumping bail in London where he had been arrested by the Metropolitan Police for money laundering.