**SUN NEWS PAPER VERSION**

**AT a time like this, the counsel is appropriate: Concentrate on the message, and leave the messenger safely alone. So, I will resist the temptation to discuss Obasanjo and concentrate on the value of his message.**  
Obasanjo, as he admitted in the letter, had advertised Buhari’s so-called weaknesses on the economy and foreign relations to no end. And, yes, Buhari may be weak in those areas, but there are certainly men of quality and vision helping out in those areas. Buhari’s Economic Team, though understated and often maligned is proving to be one of the most effective yet in the nation’s history.  
The failing of past governments has been clear. From a rural agricultural base at independence, the country transformed to an import-dependent economy upon the discovery of oil at the turn of the decade. Instead of growing our agricultural base and using the new wealth from oil to transform to a globally-competitive human capital and industrialized giant that we could be, we abandoned even the rudimentary agriculture that had served us very well until then and engaged in the export of crude oil for the personal aggrandizement of the new men in power and their collaborators, home and abroad.  
This was the challenge that faced the country for several decades until the inception of this democracy in 1999, and which Obasanjo as president couldn’t do much to reverse unfortunately. So, when Obasanjo talks of ‘round-tripping’ in the inner circles of the present government, one wonders what exactly he means. In fact, my enquiry did not yield much apart from the mild rebuke: “You know Obasanjo knows everything!” But on reflection, the retired General must have had the humungous sums in local and foreign currencies found in the NIA vaults and in places where they should not be in mind. What he accuses the Buhari government of however has indeed been the business of every past government, and that it is much in the public domain these days means that the present one is serious about eradicating it or at least reducing it to its barest minimum.  
If anyone, more so Obasanjo who knows the inner workings of government, wants to be fair, what is on display, whether with the former SGF Babachir Lawal, NIA’s Oke and now Maina’s cases, is deep rooted systemic rot which needs painstaking and proper interrogation to get to the root. Especially in the Maina case, he is certainly not alone, but in fact represents a racket that has been at the bottom of the many failed civil service reforms. A purported sack cannot be enough, no matter how quickly executed. Obasanjo, I recall, was part of the Mohammed experiment, full of fury and decisiveness, which many later adjudged to be a failure, and in fact, having the opposite effect of promoting the malaise that it sought to cure in the first place.  
Buhari lived through it all. And that is why when he made his recent statement about taking his time to come to decisions and having to live with his conscience thereafter, I thought that instead of the insults he got, what he deserved was praise. This is indeed our country, and we have seen it all. The good, and the mostly bad times!  
Which makes one to ask: do we really know the nuances of the system of government we have chosen and the change we voted for? Sadly, even Obasanjo betrayed his ignorance of both in his recent communication. Like God’s mills, the mills of democracy grind slowly, but unlike God’s mills, they hardly grind exceedingly well. This is the bitter truth we must tell ourselves. I remember many commentators judging Obasanjo’s first term (1999-2003) as having achieved very little. In fact, the most that could be pointed to was the reforms in the military and the liberalization of the communication sector. Of course, a lot more was cooking on the economic front, like the debt-forgiveness negotiations which benefit was reaped in his second term.  
Change, by its very nature, is like birth pangs of a woman. It comes with excruciating pains and dislocations. It can be slow and gradual too. As an individual, I am perhaps one of the worst affected. In my middle years and with no gainful employment, apart from a part-time job, I admonish myself and millions of others in my shoes that we may be hungry now, but we must never fall for the trap of anger. Anger is a negative emotion which does not yield anything good and lasting. What the present situation of the country requires is a deep introspection and to understand that every great nation went through these painful birth pangs before setting on the path of irrevocable development. The often cited Lee Kwan Yew’s Singapore endured his benevolent dictatorship for 15 years before the breakthrough came; Gorbachev’s USSR swallowed the bile of Glasnost and Perestroika and the dismantling of the anachronistic USSR to break forth in the 15 wonders of freedom and progress that it has become today.  
The journey that the immediate past government and the PDP as the party then in power was taking us on, could only have arrived at one destination: Golgotha! Obasanjo cannot completely absolve himself of blame from this outcome. As soon as he took the reins of office, he re-created the PDP that brought him to power in his own image. The organs of the party which are supposed to facilitate a robust generation and processing of government policy were discountenanced and completely discarded. The few, like the present agriculture minister, Audu Ogbeh who had the presence of mind to caution, were humiliated and thrown out. Under who did Chris Uba’s Anambra, Zaki-Biam and Odi massacres occur? Under whom did EFCC become a vindictive machine for achieving narrow and little political ends, despite the best efforts of the pioneer leadership of the outfit?  
All this go to show that the problems we have in our polity, go beyond strong men. We need institutional and structural reforms. I am glad that stakeholders including the ruling APC which committee just submitted its report continue’s to interrogate the issue. Some of the lapses observed so far under the present Buhari administration should have proved conclusively to all doubters, if there are still any, that our country is in urgent need of real reforms.  
And unlike, the maddening crowd out there, that is not something to take lightly or without deep contemplation. That is why again, instead of crucifying President Buhari for calling for more reflection on the subject in his New Year message to the country, we ought to take a step back and reflect. He may not be necessarily averse to restructuring like many career reformists would have us believe. His might rather just be a caution that we cannot run away from the reality that men run, and processes would be built on, whatever structure we eventually come up with.  
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