



## GIANT OF AFRICA AND THE 2007 ELECTIONS: A TRANSITION IN CRISIS?

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

“We will leave no stone unturned to ensure that we strengthen our democracy. We will do things that will gladden the hearts of our friends, and show that we take our responsibilities and obligations in Africa and the world seriously”. This assurance-cum-pledge was made by President Olusegun Obasanjo in the State House, Aso Rock, Abuja while receiving a delegation of the European Parliament led by its President Joseph Borrell-Foutelles. The assurance came in the wake of worries from within and without about the future of Nigeria as the nation prepares for a historically significant general elections in early 2007 that should ensure a successful transition from one democratically-elected government to another. Indeed, less than five months to the general elections in Nigeria billed for April 2007, the unfolding socio-political events has created an atmosphere of anxiety, worry and concern among Nigerians, Africans and the international community on the fate of democracy in Nigeria, the ‘Giant of Africa.’

#### WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING NETWORK (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region including Cameroon and Chad. Our focus was initially the Mano River Basin countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. We have since expanded to cover the entire West Africa sub-region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

Escalating violence and criminality with continued attacks on oil installations and the kidnap of foreign workers in the Niger Delta constitute a threat to Nigeria's socio-political and economic security. Recent spates of impeachments have become alarming and the Nobel Peace Prize laureate and activist, Wole Soyinka has remarked that Nigeria's State Legislatures have become a threat to democracy.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) continues to pursue politicians accused of looting public funds. High profile political murders remain a nightmare as the police and security forces have been unable to identify the assassins. The electioneering

process continues to heat up the nation's polity as the newly introduced electronic voter registration process seems to be under pressure in the wake of calls for the switch back to the previous model. Contending parties, including the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) are yet to know their presidential flag bearers. In all of this, Nigerians, 70% of whom are grappling with poverty, watch this pre-election politicking unfold, as the 'win or die' attitude seems apparent all over.

This delicate and fragile situation can again be placed within historical precedence in the timing of military truncations of governance which Nigeria as a nation has grappled with since independence. It is on record that in its 46 years of independence, no democratically elected Nigerian president has successfully handed over power to a democratically elected successor government. Transition in government is a major challenge and critical to peace and stability.

This policy brief highlights Nigeria's strategic importance in the community of nations; attempts an analysis of issues that are critical to the 2007 elections and the smooth transition; postulate possible scenarios and; options for response to avert escalation into a major crisis.

## **2. NIGERIA: A STRATEGIC ENTITY IN AFRICA & THE WORLD**

Often referred to as the 'Giant of Africa', Nigeria undoubtedly is a country of immense strategic importance in the West African sub-region, Africa, and the world. With a land mass of 923,768 square kilometres and a population of over 130 million, the nation dwarfs her neighbours in sheer size and population density.

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and its 4<sup>th</sup> largest economy. Economic perturbations in Nigeria have serious ramifications on the global scale. Oil politics is once more at the centre of the global economy characterized by a huge demand for petroleum oil. The global demand for oil is outstripping supply, resulting in the price of oil hitting an all time high of over \$60 per barrel<sup>1</sup>. This is attributable to a variety of factors, the most outstanding being the growth in demand from China and India including socio-political tensions in the Middle East and the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Nigeria as a member of OPEC is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest oil producer and the 6<sup>th</sup> largest oil exporter in the world. It is believed that in the next ten years, Africa will provide about 25-30% of oil consumed by the United States with Nigeria's quality Brent crude accounting for most of it. Disruptions in the supply of oil coming from Nigeria have catastrophic implications for the world market and the global economy. Already, the high price of oil has been identified as a contributory factor to the heating crisis in Guinea.

Nigeria has been a major player in conflict resolution and peace keeping in the Continent. The present situation escalating to crisis would reverse the prestige and standing of the nation in the maintenance of regional peace and security. Nigeria, as Africa's big brother cannot afford to have a badly transited democracy. She is also a huge ally of the West in the war against terrorism. Knowing the direct linkage between political instability and terrorism, the situation needs to be handled creatively to avoid further worsening of the present global insecurity.

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<sup>1</sup> The price hit the \$80 US per barrel of late during the heat of the Iraq war and Niger Delta crisis.

With over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is a mosaic of cultural and natural diversity. In its 46 years of independence, the nation has had a chequered political history characterized by eight military regimes and had experienced three failed democratic attempts in 1963, 1983 and 1993. The failure of these democratic attempts has been linked to poor culture of democratic practice, institutions and politics along ethnic and religious sentiments. Sectarian politics is seen by each ethnic or interest group in the country as the sure way to ensure its continuous survival and dominance.

For about a decade now, the government has been battling with wide spread violence amongst various communities in Nigeria as a result of perceived inability of the government reform policies to address social, economic and political needs. Though the country has had improved macro economic gains, micro level benefits are yet to be felt by the populace. Issues are further compounded by corrupt practices of some political office holders; continued “lack of faith” in the legal and security system; frequent attacks and assassinations that seem to carry political bearings; proliferation of small arms and gun running by political actors; human rights abuses and questions of legitimacy and trust of leadership. These have acted as avenues for the expression of gross violence, resulting in the death of over 10,000 people in inter-communal violence and the displacement of more than 400,000<sup>2</sup> others, mostly women and children, in the past five years. Indeed, the state of human insecurity in the nation has assumed a worrisome dimension<sup>3</sup>.

Governance in Nigeria since the new democratic dispensation has been confronted with high expectation of democratic dividends and the inability to match such expectations with ‘food on table’ has been transformed into disenchantment, which coupled with other factors have fuelled communal violence in all the six geo-political zones of the country. The rise of militant pressure groups seeking for socio-political ‘space’ is also a fallout of either frustration or greed and as well as self seeking ambitions that sometimes assume the face of economic empowerment.

If the political crisis in the nation degenerates to violent conflict and leads to international displacement of the citizens, the resultant humanitarian and security crisis will be unmanageable, destabilizing the entire West and Central African sub-regions and Africa as a continent, with global consequences. For a continent that has been grappling with peace and security issues, conflict in Nigeria will wipe out all gains achieved in resolving conflicts in the sub-region.

### **3. PRE-ELECTION DYNAMICS IN NIGERIA**

Each nation has its peculiarities, challenges and strengths. Generally all over the world, elections are moments everything seems to be politicized. The level of distrust, suspicion, alignment and re-alignment for political gain becomes more and more apparent. This section attempts a critical analysis of the socio-political dynamics in Nigeria in the context of the expected transition.

#### **3.1. President Obasanjo's Reform Initiative**

Since becoming President in 1999, one of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's daunting task has been to ‘clear the mess’ left by years of military rule and failed attempts at building a

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<sup>2</sup> Global IDP, Data base of the Norwegian Refugee Council

<sup>3</sup> Associated Press, December 19, 2002; CNN, March 23, 2003.

solid base for democracy and good governance. The military leadership left track records of brutality, looting of public resources and unbridled corruption that resulted in decayed infrastructure, dysfunctional state institutions, unemployment, amongst other issues. In the face of this, the government of President Obasanjo came up with certain reforms to sustain governance structures aimed at eliminating corruption, poverty and changing the perception of Nigeria in the eyes of the world. Anchored on the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) and steered by an Economic Reform Team. The reforms focused on privatization, tax reform, transparency, due process and institutional streamlining for greater efficiency. The liberalization of the telecommunications sector has brought immense benefits to the economy. The consolidation of the banking sector has also been achieved. Nigeria now boasts of powerful and competitive indigenous banks that can compete favourably with international banking institutions.

Central to the president's reform programme has been the fight against corruption. This led to the passage of the Economic and Financial Crimes - EFCC (Establishment) Act of 2002 by the National Assembly. The EFCC boss, Nuhu Ribadu represents the face of the fight against corruption in Nigeria. Ribadu has become a household name in Nigeria, greatly dreaded by financial crooks and looters of the public treasury who we can refer to as "pen robbers". Though the EFCC has recovered over \$5 billion in stolen funds<sup>4</sup>, its present activities have led to conclusions by most pundits that it has become a selective political tool. This is perceived as a dangerous trend that could undermine the fight against corruption and could create political tension that could result in chaos. In the midst of these, an issue stands out unresolved: would the successor of Obasanjo pursue the fight against corruption with the apparent vigour or would he/she succumb to pressure and parochial interests and turn the tides of witch hunting in a political vendetta game?

Nonetheless, a vivid fallout of the reform process and image laundering initiatives is the fact that the external perceptions of Nigeria and its governance has significantly improved, leading to debt forgiveness and increased aid.

### *3.2. Resource Allocation, a political and economic weapon*

Ownership of the nation's natural resources by the Federal government is enshrined in Chapter Four of the 1999 Constitution. The provision states that "the entire property in and control of all minerals, mineral oils and natural gas in, under or upon any land in Nigeria or in, under or upon the territorial waters and the Exclusive Economic Zone of Nigeria shall vest in the government of the federation".<sup>5</sup> This provision intended to pacifically settle resource based conflicts might have turned out to be a source of controversy. Critics say the clause negates true Federalism and is tantamount to continuation of the exploitative tendencies of the colonial masters. This Constitutional provision has been questioned, especially by the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta.

During the National Political Reform Conference, delegates from the South-South geopolitical Zone asked for 50% derivation of oil proceeds<sup>6</sup>. Presently the Constitution

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<sup>4</sup> Last Alex, "The Politics of Nigerian Corruption", BBC news (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/5339030.stm>)

<sup>5</sup> The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

<sup>6</sup> More on this issue is discussed in the 'Governance and National Dialogue' slot below.

provides for 13% derivation for oil producing States in the revenue sharing formula. Though the conference recommended an increase to 17%, this has not been implemented because the Constitutional Reform process was thrown out along with the entire reform package during the aborted third term bid by the National Assembly. The issue of resource allocation and control forms the main crux of agitations in the restiveness of the Niger Delta. There are also accusations that money allocated to States is shared among politicians and elites rather than invested for development purposes, making Nigeria's federalism a revenue sharing as opposed to a revenue generating system.

### *3.3. Governance and National Dialogue*

Nigeria is home to about 250 different ethnic groups. The nation's chronic instability has been attributed to the nature of federalism as it is presently constituted and practiced. More of a unitary system of government, power and resources are concentrated at the centre. This has led to a vicious inter-ethnic struggle for control of power by the three major ethnic groups. The numerous minority ethnic groups therefore feel marginalized in the process. Military interference into governance compounded matters. As more power gravitated to the centre, the nation was broken down into an ever increasing number of states, presently thirty six. Efforts at bringing governance closer to the people and giving them more autonomy is seen as weakening the unity of the larger ethnic groups and their ability to challenge the centre<sup>7</sup>.

In an attempt to address this contradiction of nationhood, the Obasanjo-led government responded to calls for a Sovereign National Conference by convening a National Political Reforms Conference to re-examine the Constitution that was written and adopted during military dictatorship and the political structure of the nation on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 2005. This conference, it was hoped, would create a forum for a fair and balanced discussion of all the issues that had saddled the country since independence to facilitate the creation of an acceptable federal structure that would sustain the unity of the nation.

The 400 delegates to the conference which lasted four months constituted themselves into 19 thematic committees. Delegates were selected by the government and this received heavy criticism for the expected biased outcome that would favour government and therefore unable to articulate the views and needs of a majority Nigerians. The various geo-political zones came to the Conference with various positions: the South East wanted Fiscal Federalism and more autonomy; the South West wanted Regionalism; the South-South wanted Resource Control; the North preferred the Status Quo<sup>8</sup>. The Conference which sat till July 2005 received 705 memorandums from various ethnic and interest groups and produced a total of 185 recommendations. It ended in controversy as it failed to achieve consensus on two issues – Resource Control and tenure of the President and Governors. The failure to address the burning issue of Resource Control infuriated delegates from the South-South who staged a walk out.

Rather than achieve the way forward to the desired unity, this conference sharpened the divide between various ethnic groups as they failed to achieve consensus on various contentious national issues. Subsequent attempts to hold a more credible conference

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<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment", Africa Report No 119, September 26, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Onuoha Austin, "Report on the National Political Reform Conference: A Challenge or Opportunity for Peacebuilding", Peacebuilding newsletter, Vol.1 No.3.

devoid of political manipulations under the auspices of Pro-National Conference coalition of civil society and activist groups-PRONACO failed to achieve the anticipated impact.

#### *3.4. Death of Third Term Bid*

Although it started as mere speculation, the rumoured attempt by President Obasanjo to perpetuate himself in office beyond the constitutional stipulations was seemingly becoming real with the institution of a panel to review certain Constitutional provisions, the most glaring being those on the tenure of the President and Governors. The committee had recommended an extension to three terms of four years each. Prior to this, the Constitution provided for two terms of four years each for both the President and the State Governors.

No sooner was the plot made public by media reports than civil society groups, politicians, the media and the international community prevailed on the President to drop the third term agenda on the grounds that it would weaken the nation's fledgling democracy. The decision by the National Assembly to throw out the Constitution amendment bill led to the opening up of the political space for various contenders. The media was central in the campaign against the third term. A pivotal role in the anti third term bid was that of the Africa Independent Television (AIT) that decided to broadcast proceedings in the parliament live and this dissuaded many Senators from going against the wishes of the masses and their constituencies.

The spate of impeachments blowing across the nation, however, has buttressed the speculation that the President may still want to stay in power. It is believed that these recent political happenings are aimed at creating a state of anarchy unfavourable to the conduct of the 2007 elections. Political pundits have speculated that the provisions of section 135 of the Constitution which allows the President to remain in power if elections are unable to hold could be invoked in another attempt at tenure elongation. Moreover, those who opposed the attempt at prolonging the President's continuous stay in power are perceived as targets in the present "war against corruption", creating tension in the polity. The main fear for the third term agenda as expressed by the Secretary General of the United Nations is its open invitation to military re-incursion into governance<sup>9</sup>. John Negroponte of the US Central Intelligence Agency also told a Senate committee in March 2006 that third term elongation in Nigeria "could trigger a disruption of oil supply, secessionist moves by regional governments, major refugee flows and instability elsewhere in West Africa"<sup>10</sup>.

#### *3.5. Census and politics*

Population figures have been a sensitive and controversial issue because of its implications for shaping regional, state and ethnic relations as well as balance of power in Nigeria since independence. Statistics on population have been estimates often left at the mercy of politicians who inflated and deflated numbers in the political game that has a direct influence on how much goes where.

Nigeria carried out its last but one census exercise in 1991. Amidst complaints of manipulation, the census placed the nation's population at 88.9 million, almost evenly

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<sup>9</sup> Adesina Debo, "Annan Says No to Tenure Extension," *The Guardian* newspaper, May 10, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> *Times Magazine*, May 8, 2006, p.17.

divided between the two sexes. The annual population growth rate is placed at 2.9%. A new census took place in March, 2006 amidst a controversy over the type of data to be collected. Data related to ethnicity and religion was left out at the instance of political pressure. Traditional and political leaders in the largely Muslim northern States expressed their strong opposition to the inclusion of questions on religious persuasion and ethnicity in the census questionnaire. They warned that they would mobilize people in the states against taking part in the census if the questions were included. The governors of States in the south-east, on the other hand, responded with a counter warning, threatening to mobilize against the headcount in their states if the data to be collected did not include the numerical strengths of every religious and ethnic group. The National Population Commission succumbed and announced that it was abandoning the inclusion of the sensitive subject.

It is widely believed that manipulations for control of resources and power begin at the census level. The distribution of funds which accrue to the nation among the 36 component states is based largely on population. States with high population figures are allotted greater chunks of the national cake. The census results of March 2006 exercise<sup>11</sup> are yet to be published and it is anticipated that some States may reject the official results if they fall short of expectation. A logical and realistic development would have been the establishment of an electoral register based on the results of the recently conducted population census to avoid duplication of efforts and resources.

#### **4. KEY ACCELARATORS OF CONFLICT & THREATS**

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This segment focuses on the key issues and developments, and threats that may heat up the socio-political situation and may likely precipitate the country's drive towards the threshold of violence in the context of the forthcoming elections.

##### *4.1. Succession Scramble.*

With the throwing out of the agenda for tenure elongation earlier in the year, it became obvious that the position of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was open for contest. The key riddle now is predicting who the likely successor of President Obasanjo would be. The issue becomes complicated when geopolitical zones that have never produced a president now claim it is their turn. Media reports purport that there was a tacit agreement at the inception of the present democratic dispensation to allow Obasanjo, a Southerner to assume office, with the agreement that power will next be zoned back to the Greater North. This 'gentleman's agreement' of the ruling PDP is being questioned by the Greater South, especially the South-South by asking who signed this agreement, when and on whose behalf. Some apparently inciting statements on this debate have been attributed to some political leaders of the Greater North, one of such saying that the South-South for instance has no 'Presidential Material'<sup>12</sup>. These statements imply that the North sees power as their birthright and the issue is not up for debate.

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<sup>11</sup> The electoral register in Ghana for instance was upgraded thanks to the 2000 national census. Four months before elections, the Ghana electoral body had already published the electoral list for verification and rectifications.

<sup>12</sup> Meaning there is no person from the region that has what it takes to be a president.

The South-South in particular is making a claim for the Presidency. They have formed a pressure group known as the South-South Assembly (SSA) and have made far reaching proclamations asking for a better stake in the 'Nigerian project'. They have also threatened to reject any politician from the zone who accepts to be running mate to any Northern contender. With a basket of grievances, unemployed youth and proliferation of arms in the Niger Delta, the non-realization of South-South President in the 2007 elections could be the trigger for full scale rebellion in the zone. However, chances of the South-South pushing their agenda may have been compromised by its support for the tenure elongation. Besides, the impression given is that a South-South President would be appointed, and not voted. Secondly, the idea ignores the probability for a strong grand opposition alliance that may produce a popular leader who may not necessarily be from the ruling PDP nor from the South-South. The trump card which is crude oil remains a strategic weapon in the hands of the South-South.

In the South-East geopolitical zone, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has also threatened that the region would secede if the presidency is not zoned to the South East. Perceptions that the South-East will be sidelined or ignored in the scheme of things may propel MASSOB to resume nationalist activities despite repression from the government. While the Greater North on its own is unable to presently unite behind a single candidate, the Greater South too is lining many candidates probably for strategic reasons. Notwithstanding, any indication or perception of intimidation of the North in the unfolding feud between the President and his Vice may be a rallying factor of the Greater North behind the Vice President since politics in this part of the world seem to be anchored more on ethnic and religious grounds than ideology.

Yet the ongoing agitations and threats may be political game meant to secure major political concessions. The idea of a rotational presidency that was meant to curb the excessive abuse of power by one region over the other and establish an inclusive arrangement was one of the issues recommended for inclusion in the constitution amendment exercise but like the baby and the bath, it was thrown away with the tenure extension agenda.

#### *4.2. Relationship between the President and the Vice President*

Nigerians have watched with dismay the unfolding mudslinging between the top leadership of the nation. The accusations and counter accusations of corruption have been described by analysts as nothing but the climax to a long standing game of intrigues between the President and his Vice. Matters came to the peak when the Vice President was accused of financial impropriety by an EFCC report and an investigatory panel headed by the Chief Justice of the Federation probing the management of the Petroleum Development Trust Fund. Media speculations claim that the divorce stems from the Vice President's presidential ambitions and his perceived disloyalty in criticizing the third term bid by the president. He has also been associated with an opposition party. The Vice President is presently suspended from the ruling People's Democratic Party. On Saturday November 25, 2006, the Vice President in an open ceremony at Abuja declared that he would be contesting in the 2007 Presidential elections and the platform or party remains a matter of conjecture.

The public statements, acrimony and 'washing of dirty linens' shocked many Nigerians who see in the feud a clear indication that their leaders lack the ability to separate

personal egos from issues of national interest and image. The revelations and threats of uncovering of more cans of worms is a clear explanation for the nation's underdevelopment, the present pervading poverty and the negative state of human security. While some have called the clash a divine occurrence that would expose and ridicule the leadership, opinion leaders have called for caution in handling this issue capable of destabilizing the nation and have asked both sides to put the interest of the nation before their personal egos.

#### *4.3. Spates of Assassinations and attempted assassinations*

Within the quarter of July to September alone, three high profile assassinations were recorded in the South West zone of Nigeria, coupled with several attempted ones. This is seen as a negation of democracy and practice of politics of desperation, intimidation, fear and harassment aimed at discouraging credible candidates from emerging through genuine free and fair elections. In Nigeria, vying for political power is perceived as a do or die affair by the political elite. If left unchecked, the trend heralds bloody elections and is a bad omen with serious threat to democracy, peace and stability in Nigeria. The phenomenon could lead to the emergence of unrepresentative and oppressive leadership worse than the military dictatorship of the past.

Moreover, continued assassinations and the inability of the Nigerian police to trace and arrest the culprits could lead to reprisals and communal or sectarian violence. The Inspector General of Police and the Director General of the State Security Service were summoned by the Senate on this state of increased insecurity to give the crime and security intelligence report of the nation respectively. One of such victims of political assassinations was Funsho Williams, a gubernatorial aspirant in Lagos State who was assassinated at his residence by unknown assailants. The Nigerian Government in an attempt to track the assassins invited the London Metropolitan police to investigate the death of Chief Williams. The move was interpreted as an indicator of the total failure of the nation's security institutions to protect and secure the lives of Nigerians, detect and prevent crime.

#### *4.4. The Impeachment Weapon*

The average Nigerian on the street would have added a new word to their vocabulary by now as a result of recent political happenings in the nation. This is attributable to the total abuse of the constitutionally provided process of removing an executive for abuse of office. The impeachment gale blowing through the nation is gradually moving the nation to a state of political chaos. In the past ten months, four governors have been impeached through procedures that have raised serious issues concerning adherence to due process.

Oyo State in the South West remains volatile due to tension following a court ruling nullifying the impeachment of former Governor Ladoja. In Ekiti State, a state of emergency has been decreed following a controversial impeachment process that sent packing Governor Fayose and a Military Administrator appointed to rule Ekiti in an attempt to curb descent into political chaos and anarchy. The Anambra State Governor Peter Obi who just recovered his mandate after a long court battle since the 2003 elections was impeached by lawmakers<sup>13</sup>. Plateau State in North Central Zone that has been under tight security since a state of emergency has finally taken the queue as Governor Joshua Dariye too has been impeached.

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<sup>13</sup> The impeachment took place at 5am when the constituents and the Governor were fast asleep.

In all cases, the affected states have all been plunged into crisis, resulting in a State of Emergency being declared in Ekiti State and loss of lives in Plateau State and 'legitimized' thuggery in Oyo State. The constitutional requirements of two third 2/3 majority has in all of the cases been subverted, along with media reports of law makers being forced at gunpoint to sign impeachment notices. The judiciary has also been compromised in some of the cases and the Nigerian Bar Association has vehemently denounced it.

#### *4.5. Oil, Militancy and Restiveness in the Niger Delta*

The creeks and swamps of Niger Delta area that covers nine states-Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Cross Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Ondo, Imo and Abia States-sit on one of the world's biggest oil reserves with about 54 billion barrels of oil. The oil explored in the region accounts for over 85% of government revenue and 95% of the nation's foreign exchange<sup>14</sup>. The region is ironically home to some of the nation's poorest people, some living in what can now be termed the world's worst environmental disasters. Some villages in this region do not have potable water, electricity, health facilities, and schools. Due to environmental pollution by oil spills, fishing activities that constitute the traditional source of livelihood have been abandoned.

The sharing of resources accruing from oil exploration between the three tiers of government and among the 36 states of the federation has remained a volatile issue in the nation. According to the Niger Deltans, the 13% derivation provided for in the 1999 Constitution after long years of marginalization is inadequate. A proposed increase to 18% at the national conference did not meet the yearnings of the people who wanted a real Federal arrangement where they controlled 100% of the resources in their communities and paid royalties to the government.

Recently, the restiveness of the region started to manifest a deadly threat. Hostage taking became a new phenomenon with expatriate workers kidnapped or abducted in exchange for ransom. Thus it is no longer an issue of deprivation and marginalization alone. It has become a lucrative business tactic for the network of kidnapers. Presently, the Niger Delta crisis has assumed a worrisome dimension, with sophisticatedly armed gangs and ethnic militia calling the shots, and blatant criminality becoming an everyday reality in the region. The Federal Government's deployment of soldiers to the area has failed to bring the situation under control.

The militants have organized themselves under such groups as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV). Frontline leaders include Asari Dokubo who is presently jailed by the federal government on charges of treason and Tom Ateke declared wanted for armed robbery. This militancy has made Nigeria's oil fields among the most dangerous, critically affecting production and world market crude oil prices on a daily basis. Reports indicate that production has dropped by about 20 percent<sup>15</sup> due to militant attacks on production facilities.

With this recurrent history of pollution, deprivation and marginalization blamed on the Federal Government and the oil companies, protests have kept the region in a state of

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<sup>14</sup> UNDP Human Development Report, 2000-2001 Millennium edition.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson Simon, Oporoza, "Nigeria's Deadly Days", Times Magazine, May 22, 2006, p.22.

perpetual crisis. Given the fact that oil constitutes a major source of government revenue and foreign exchange, the situation in the Niger Delta has negative implications for the nation. The insatiable demand for oil by India and China coupled with the crisis in the Middle East makes a Nigeria critical supplier.

It is also feared that during elections, desperate politicians could seek the support of these militants to attack their political opponents, while the militants themselves could use their weapons to terrorize their communities and hold them to ransom. Moreover, the prevalent insecurity in the region would make electoral officials reluctant to work in those areas.

#### *4.6. Proliferation of Arms in the polity*

Apart from the proliferation of arms in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian Inspector General of Police raised an alarm over reports of arms being stockpiled by politicians in preparation for the 2007 elections. Arms are said to be carried openly in some states to scare off credible contestants and are used freely at political rallies. Media reports say the Federal Government has imported 40,000 AK rifles<sup>16</sup> for the Nigerian Police Force. Questions are being raised about the implications of this for internal security in the election and post election period. It is feared that these arms could get into the hands of criminal elements and turn into weapons of mass terror on Nigerians, further worsening the state of human insecurity.

#### *4.7. Political 'Thuggery'*

Use of political thugs is increasingly becoming part of the strategy by politicians when faced by formidable opponents who cannot be defeated through transparent and competitive elections. Political 'thuggery', whether real or imagined, is assuming a very worrisome dimension. Media reports have revealed that in Delta State of South-South geopolitical zone, politicians might have taken use of political thugs to a new level. The State Security Service (SSS) has drawn attention to the fact that politicians are not only recruiting thugs, but are giving them police uniforms and using them as security aides.<sup>17</sup> This portends grave threats not just to the political process, but to national security. In the ancient city of Ibadan in Oyo State, thugs sponsored by political godfathers have apparently taken over control of Ibadan. In early November 2006, the State witnessed a spree of looting, armed robberies, killing and arson. This is interpreted as a political strategy to intimidate the former impeached Governor, Senator Ladoja, from returning to office following a court ruling in his favour. Social and economic activities were brought to a standstill as residents either fled the city or remained locked up in their homes. Political 'thuggery' therefore poses a great threat to human security and a smooth electoral process if not checked.

#### *4.8. Voter Registration*

"I will organize free and fair elections even if it is the last thing I will do in my life". This affirmation came from the Chairman of the independent national electoral commission (INEC), Professor Maurice Iwu. This commitment notwithstanding, it is becoming clear that the on-going voter registration process is facing serious challenges that could negatively affect the forthcoming elections. Confidence in the nationwide electronic

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<sup>16</sup> *ThisDay* newspaper, Friday, November 17, 2006, p.9.

<sup>17</sup> *The Guardian* newspaper, Friday November 17.

voters' registration exercise in most States across the Federation has waned. The House of Representatives summoned the INEC boss as worries over the process persist. As at the end of November 2006, the registration process was still marred by widespread complaints of inadequate and non functioning machines, amidst allegations of non payment of casual staff of INEC. According to Iwu, only an estimated 3 million voters had so far been registered in a process that was planned to end by mid-December. Critics have interpreted this delay as a strategy to ensure the postponement of the exercise and the 2007 elections.

## **5. INTERVENING FACTORS**

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One would obviously conclude that Nigeria would disintegrate given the magnitude of threats at the impulse of a major trigger. At the peak of heightened tension and major crisis, Nigerians are never hesitant to say: "that is Nigeria for you". This statement has lots of meaning. One is that there is always a way out and the expected sudden drive to a major explosion never comes. Despite the grim picture presented in this transition analysis, Nigeria as a country is endowed with shock absorbers which if well sourced are capable of mitigating the threats. The intervening factors here refer to the peace generating factors and or conflict carrying capacities that the country is endowed with. We attempt a discussion of some of these factors below.

### *5.1. A thriving civil society sector*

One of the outcomes of military rule in Nigeria has been the emergence of a viable civil society. The labour unions, associations of professional groups, human rights organizations and various activist groups and forums exist and have not been silent on the key issues affecting the population. Civil society is competing for space in a dynamic socio-political context, striving to serve as the voice of the voiceless. Prominent figures like the Nobel Peace Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and other distinguished personalities have become the main voices of Nigeria's down trodden. Civil society groups, including WANEP have maintained close watch of the present political process and some have been working with various stake holders and groups to ensure violent free elections.

### *5.2. A vibrant, independent media*

Nigeria has one of the most vigilant and informed media in Africa. A recent survey revealed that Nigerians believed their media more than the government and trusted it than any other international news media. More than 280 radio and television licences have been granted to private operators in Nigeria. In addition, there are more than 100 national and local newspapers and publications; some of them state owned<sup>18</sup>. The media has always maintained vigilance in governance. Molestation by successive military regimes, including the death in a parcel bomb of Dele Giwa, rather than intimidate instead galvanized the Nigerian media. The media focus on the attempted tenure elongation created the needed awareness that led to its demise. Collaboration between civil society and the media with the support of the international community created the necessary pressure that compelled the military to return to the barracks. Such a

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<sup>18</sup> BBC Country Profile, Nigeria and BBC news.

partnership is still relevant and would be critical in creating the atmosphere for free and fair elections.

### *5.3. Religious beliefs of Nigerians*

Another survey two years ago revealed that Nigerians were the most religious people in Africa. Whatever this portends, it is important to note that religiosity may not entail peace but it creates a spirit of hope and fear of God thereby regulating societal behaviour. Religiosity has been exploited by politicians and other leaders for parochial tendencies. Nigerians have absolute belief in God's ability to handle issues for them. This reduces the temptation to resort to violence as a response to governance and societal issues. An example of this is the belief that the death of former President Sani Abacha was an act of divine intervention to save the nation from dictatorship. Moreover, all over the country, religious leaders have enjoined their flock to pray against and shun violence in the coming elections. The proliferation of prayers and prayer groups and involvement of religious institutions in the political process has and will continue to be a cushioning weapon. Moreover, the inter-religious dialogue that has been encouraged and institutionalized following past inter-religious clashes between Christians and Moslems is a valuable asset for peace even in delicate times like the forth coming elections.

### *5.4. The Army and its Peace enforcement Mission*

The armed forces of Nigeria whose fame stretches to Sierra Leone and Liberia in the context of peace missions constitute a force for stability. Although the recent history reveals an armed force that has been used to ruthlessly suppress communities that defied state authority<sup>19</sup>, the powerful Nigerian army by all standards can be deployed to beef up the police forces as a restraining factor in the face of national emergencies. It should be recalled that it was the deployment of the army by former military leader, Abdulsalami Abubakar, that halted an implosion of anger and hatred thus averting mass violence when Chief Moshood Abiola who is believed to have won the 1993 elections died in detention in 1997.

### *5.5. President Olusegun Obasanjo in the international community*

President Obasanjo is highly respected by the international community. His interventions in African conflicts and his ability to wield his influence and that of Nigeria as the 'big brother' of Africa has been an asset for peace. The peaceful settlement of the Bakassi Peninsular conflict with Cameroon and the subsequent withdrawal of Nigerian forces are concrete moves that have made the international community take Obasanjo for his words. The international community though concerned with the transitional issue in Nigeria remain confident (albeit the benefit of doubt) that President Obasanjo would ensure a smooth transition through free, fair and transparent elections come April 2006. With the need to maintain his status in the international community especially as former president, he can be prevailed upon to take the actions necessary to ensure free and fair elections.

## **6. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS**

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### *6.1. Good Case Scenario*

Despite the misgivings, violence free elections are conducted and a smooth civilian to

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<sup>19</sup> Zakibiam crisis, Tiv-Junkun crisis, Odi crisis.

civilian transition occurs. Political parties field credible candidates from local council through state houses of legislature and state executives to the National Assembly who contest in free and fair elections wherein the verdict is accepted by all. President Obasanjo hands over power to the new President and the nation's democracy is consolidated and Nigerians look forward to good governance and development.

#### *6.2. Bad Case Scenario (A)*

The tension and violence in the polity continues unabated. The poor registration process disenfranchises millions of potential voters and electoral violence by saboteurs and thugs disrupt the whole exercise rendering its credibility in complete jeopardy. A chaotic situation ensues.

#### *6.2. Bad Case Scenario (B)*

The apparent 'manipulation' of the transition process continues, creating a context that is not conducive to elections, leading to the cancellation of the 2007 polls. The President invokes article 135 of the Constitution to remain in power. Nigerians, particularly those from the South-South interpret this as denial to their 'legitimate' yearning to ascend the Presidency. The militancy takes new dimensions with the open benediction of the political class leading to a major crisis with undertones of secession. MASSOB moves to actualize the State of Biafra resulting in confrontations with the army. In a bid to avert the long predicted disintegration of the nation, the military returns, sponsored by aggrieved Northern elite.

#### *6.3. Realistic Case Scenario.*

The tension in the polity continues and President Obasanjo embarks on dialogue both within his ruling party and amongst various socio-political stakeholders. A quasi consensus emerges that credible elections cannot hold in April and an agreement is reached to postpone elections for three to six months but the run up to the elections remain tense with all means adopted by contenders to cling political office. The election records high levels of violence and rigging, with the electorate staying away from the polls. Though the President is constrained to hand over power, another unrepresentative selected government emerges. Nigerians in their usual manner resign their fate to God.

## **7. POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE/ACTION**

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This section proposes possible options for response action to avert a worse case scenario and work towards realizing the best case.

#### *7.1. Critical role of the Media*

- ❑ More than ever before, the Nigeria media should work assiduously to ensure that the media remains the oxygen of democracy. In the words of the American Ambassador to Nigeria, the media should inform and educate the public, provide a check on those in power, expose the abuse of power, and give voice to the persecuted.
- ❑ The Nigeria media plays (and should continue to do so) the key role of drawing attention to issues in the political process by objectively reporting key happenings and focusing attention on the critical issues affecting peace, stability and unity of Nigeria.
- ❑ The media must ensure objectivity in observations and report accurately on the positions of all the candidates in the elections, capturing the concerns of Nigeria's

- electorate and report fairly on what the voters view as the most important issues.
- ❑ Guard against monetary enticements and manipulation by politicians by putting the national interest of Nigerian and voiceless masses at the core.

### 7.2. Civil Society

- ❑ More coordination of and collaboration between civil society organizations (CSOs) in a coalition towards a violence free elections. Issues arising from the transition process are multi dimensional and need a creation of a balanced role matrix. Entry points include NGOs working with the police, training the army, working with youth, grassroots organizations, and human rights amongst others.
- ❑ Civil society, in collaboration with the media needs to closely monitor the actions of critical stake holders in the transition process such as the security agents, electoral commission, judiciary, and the legislature for possible responses, naming and shaming where necessary.
- ❑ WANEP has the institutional structure needed for effective collaborations of the different facets needed to achieve a crisis free transition. WANEP Nigeria can create a platform to effectively monitor, analyze and report for prompt action.
- ❑ The *Elections Barometer* monitoring data base created by WANEP should be enhanced as a tool to effective monitoring and analysis.

### 7.3. Political Parties

There are presently over 40 political parties registered by INEC in the country. This development was interpreted as positive with the argument that such an open democratic space provides a platform for healthy political competition through debates and competition for the votes of the electorate. This would then lead to the emergence of credible candidates.

- ❑ *Violence Free Elections:* Some opposition parties and their leaders are now perceived as political adventurers who left the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party out of frustration and marginalization and would do anything to wrest power from the ruling party. On other hand, the PDP should not employ tactics and power of incumbency to retain their hold on power. This would dissipate fears of an election that will be marred by violence and thuggery as incumbents as well as aspirants would strive to win at all cost.
- ❑ *Alternative Programmes:* Electorate must ensure that the candidates and their parties present alternatives and concrete programs and issues, not just names and faces. Political alliances and mergers are being planned to present a formidable challenge to the ruling PDP but Nigerians should watch out for change for change's sake.
- ❑ *Code of Conduct:* There is a need for political parties to enforce a Code of Conduct that forbids intra or inter party violence and the use of thugs. In this regard, political actors should be held responsible for acts of violence traced to their supporters and prosecuted accordingly.
- ❑ *Political Assassinations:* Recent assassinations have raised questions of impunity and possibility that if left unchecked may lead to violent reprisals, further heightening the state of insecurity.
- ❑ *Managing Intra-Party Squabbles:* The Peoples, Democratic Party (PDP) which is the ruling party which has recorded the highest political killings needs to take serious steps to manage its intra-party crisis.

#### 7.4. *Protecting Vulnerable Groups, especially Women and Children*

The Crisis ridden transition process has impacted negatively on women both as spouses of politicians, mothers, as pressure groups and as victims of patriarchal repressive cultures. The continued marginalization of women in the Nigerian political processes has been described as 'leaving a critical half of one's resources in an attempt to achieve full potentials.'<sup>20</sup> Apart from the deliberate exclusion of women in some parts of Nigeria, women as wives and mothers of assassinated politicians often bear the heaviest burden yet they remain the silent victims of election violence.

- ❑ Women's rights, particularly political rights to vote should be protected in all States of the Federation.
- ❑ Adequate measures should be made to ensure that women and children are protected from the marauding hands of the insensitive oppressors.
- ❑ Children who are used as thugs should be sensitized, educated and protected.

#### 7.5. *International Community*

The world has become a global shared space. So interconnected are nations today that events in one part of the world has immediate impact on others – a cartoon in Denmark led to killings in Northern Nigeria. The unfolding potential for violence in Nigeria must not be allowed to degenerate. This will have far reaching regional and global consequences. The international community needs to adopt a carrot and stick approach to persuade the Nigerian Government to facilitate a participatory and violence free civilian to civilian transition. In line with this there is an urgent need for the following:

- ❑ End the feud between the President and his Vice;
- ❑ Find urgent solutions to the crisis in the Niger Delta;
- ❑ Build the capacity of the police and improve their living conditions to give them sufficient motivation to effectively manage the transition by avoiding bias and overcoming ineptitude in its actions ;
- ❑ Ensure the independence of the judiciary and the implementation of its decisions especially with regards to impeachment crisis and electoral litigations;
- ❑ Adhere to the directive of the Legislature to avoid heating up the polity by ending the spate impeachments that seem to be the handiwork of the Executive and EFCC;
- ❑ ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union and the Security Council should insist on constitutionality and transparency in the process to achieve free and fair elections;
- ❑ International community should prevail on the President (EU has started) to ensure transparent general elections that would inform smooth transition;

#### **Conclusion**

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Though the present socio-political context in which the transition is happening presents serious threats to peace and security in Nigeria, it can still be managed to avert escalation to conflict. It therefore becomes a process that needs: the willingness to concede and compromise by political players in the interest of peace; the input of critical institutional stakeholders; the support and monitoring of the international community; the vigilance of the media and civil society; and the ownership of the electorate. This is one

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<sup>20</sup> Osakwe B., *Marginalization of Nigerian Women in Politics*, Violence Watch 2003

sure way to ensure free and fair elections to guarantee the emergence of credible leadership that will deliver good governance and address the various issues threatening the unity of the nation. Only then would elections in Nigeria be an opportunity for winners to celebrate and losers to concede defeat. Above all, and whatever the results, it should be an opportunity for Africa to celebrate a major milestone in democracy in which the real winner would be Nigerians and Africa as a continent.

WANEP-Nigeria in pursuit of its mission of ensuring a peaceful and democratic Nigeria characterised by good governance, transparency and sustainable development is determined to play its own part by consistently monitoring the unfolding situation. As part of its contribution to effective electioneering process, the Network has developed an ELECTION BAROMETER which comprises a set of indicators to monitor and analyze emerging political issues and trends towards the 2007 elections. The barometer tracks these issues on weekly basis, analyzes and makes recommendations to policy makers in the framework of the early warning and early response programme.

