

viewpoint

Nigeria won't break up



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HOW many times have we heard the expression “Nigeria won’t break up”? This clichéd expression has become the chorus of Nigeria’s ruling elite; an elite that will not raise a finger to defend the territorial integrity of Nigeria if it becomes necessary to do so.

Like every bankrupt ruling class, ours never ceases to find an opportunity to proclaim its commitment to the country and her unity. One such opportunity offered itself a few days ago during the Inter-Denominational Church Service to mark the 2013 Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebrations at the National Christian Centre in Abuja.

The Armed Forces Remembrance Day, also known as Remembrance Day, was celebrated on November 11 to coincide with the Remembrance Day for veterans of the World War II in the British Commonwealth of Nations. The date was changed to January 15, in commemoration of the surrender of Biafran troops to the Federal troops on 15 January, 1970, an action that brought the Nigerian Civil War to an end. January 15 is also remembered for another important event in Nigeria’s tortuous road to democratic governance and nationhood. It was on that day, 47 years ago, that the first of many military coups took place, ending Nigeria’s First Republic.

It is understandable, therefore, if presidential emotions run high on Remembrance Day. While lauding the Armed Forces and other security services for their efforts to “keep the nation one and in peace” the President assured Nigerians that the country would not break up. “Some people talk about disintegration of Nigeria, now even at political levels, some people take it as a weapon...

when they want to discuss politics. But my conviction, and I believe that of most people here and those listening to us, is that Nigeria will continue to remain a united nation,” the President averred.

Two months ago, at the height of the debate about another petrol price increase, the President had likened the pains Nigerians were experiencing to a boil on the face of a five-year-old girl. Then, he had suggested surgery for the little girl with an assurance that “if she bears the pain and does the incision and treats it, after some days or weeks, the child will grow up to be a beautiful lady”. The President was saying in essence that Nigerians should be ready to bear the pain of his government’s agonising policies.

This time around, President Jonathan likened Nigeria to a 100-year-old marriage which, in his wisdom, is indissoluble. “Nigeria will not disintegrate... I know Nigeria will remain one”, the President assured his audience. “In 2014, we will celebrate our centenary, 100 years in existence. It will only take two mad people to stay in marriage for 100 years and say that is the time you will divorce and we are not mad. If there are issues that have been brewing over the period and we have been managing, we will continue to manage.”

I wonder why the President keeps coming up with these pedestrian comparisons. First, there are not many people in the world who live up to 100 years and there are even fewer who are married for that long. Even if we assume that the President was speaking metaphorically, there is no law that says people who have been married for so long can’t go their separate ways. You don’t have to be mad to divorce after being married for a long time. Sacrifice, yes, but marriages survive based on trust, love and respect, not because of how long. No marriage can survive for too long if it is based on abuse, neglect and deprivation.

Mr. President, we can’t continue to manage after over five decades of independence and almost a century of amalgamation and billions of dollars in earnings. Every Nigerian, including those whose actions have brought the country to its knees, has become a professional manager. No country can survive that continues to patch rather than fix once and for all the long-term structural problems that continue to hold down its progress.

Waxing patriotic, President Jonathan had this to say about the motherland: “I always say that Nigeria is great not because of our oil, because we have people that produce more oil than us but we are appreciated and still reckoned with because of our size and diversity both for human beings and environment. These are areas we should exploit for unity and development”.

Mr. President, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the reality is that Nigeria is only great in our imaginations. Nigeria is big for nothing! We are not respected in the comity of nations; our citizens are mistreated around the world, sometimes because of their actions, and other times simply because they have a green passport. What is there to respect? Even with the abundance of human and natural resources, we have one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. We are ranked amongst the most corrupt nations in the world and we are in competition with Afghanistan, Chad, Angola, DR Congo and Pakistan, for countries with persistent polio transmission. To our eternal shame, while Afghanistan’s polio programme has been described as “consistently performing at a reasonable level”, Nigeria’s “has slipped back in a quite alarming way”.

That President Jonathan – like those before him – has to use every opportunity to proclaim that “Nigeria won’t break up” is reflective of the state of our union. Forty three years after the civil war ended, we have a virtual war on our hands. The same

issues that existed before the civil war began are still with us, except that today they have grown worse. The President is unable to visit certain parts of the country; fiends are murdering at will in the name of religion; militancy has become profitable; armed robbers and “freelance assassins” prowl the country while kidnapping has become a lucrative profession; poverty, anger and disillusionment are rife; and our corrupt public officials have graduated from 10 per cent to 150 per cent kickback. What this means is that our rulers, and their collaborators in the private sector, have become so brazen that contractors are guaranteed to receive full payment for a contract that was never started, let alone completed. And they are entitled to an additional half of the total contract sum after a review of the contract in line with the rate of inflation.

Indeed, we are witnessing a scenario worse than the country breaking up. The real fear shouldn’t be the country breaking up because that is a harder and much longer route to travel. The real fear is the possibility that anarchy will envelop the country and we will go the route of Somalia, the poster child of failed states.

The President admonishes “us all (to) stand up and condemn those who say otherwise about our unity. Those who call for our disintegration or who make similar statements should be condemned by all Nigerians”. I agree with the President. Now also is the time for all Nigerians, including the President himself, to rise up in one voice and condemn those ills that breed terrorism, anger, disillusionment, poverty and threaten the unity of the country. Ills such as corruption, abuse of power and suppression of the rule of law.

Ultimately, Nigerians would have to take control of their destiny and decide the shape of things to come. If in the end the country survives the doomsday prophesy, it won’t be because the present administration has done anything to stem the slide.