

viewpoint

IBB's two-party solution



■ **Chido Onumah**
conumah@hotmail.com

GEN. Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, also known as IBB, must be a deeply-troubled man; a retired General haunted by his past. There is no other way to explain his constant attempt to intrude into our national psyche after ruling the country for eight inglorious years. The former military president, as he labelled himself then, never misses an opportunity to show how relevant he is even though history can't support that delusion. The recent merger of major opposition political parties to form the All Progressives Congress provided a good opportunity for him.

"IBB okays merger of political parties, insists on two party system", was the headline in one newspaper a few weeks ago. The report seemed to have gone unnoticed by the horde of news junkies and commentators on Nigeria. It was expected. I don't know anyone out there who hasn't grown weary of Babangida and what he has to say about the political and social trajectory of the country. For him, the merger talk is a vindication of his two party philosophy which he believes "is the best political option for Nigeria".

"When I introduced a two-party system, you people said I am a soldier, now you have seen why I went for a two-party system. I am happy for the emergence of the APC. It is a welcome political development", IBB noted. The self-styled evil genius has since gone ahead to expand on his two-party theory. Though a founding member of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party, Babangida said he had not made up his mind on the political party to vote for in 2015, and that he was leaning toward voting for the APC. "I have enough time to think and I am thinking and they will be anxious to come and see me", he boasted.

"I am a firm believer in a two-party system and I also studied the emergence of political parties in this country immediately after independence and

it shows that this country will be heading for a two-party system", Babangida said in his familiar fit of self-adulation. "When we were doing it in 1989, some of you wrote us in the media that, no it is going to be one Christian party, one Muslim party, then you said, it is going to be one northern and one southern party and it did not work and everybody blended. The chairman of the National Republican Congress was Chief Tom Ikimi, the chairman of Social Democratic Party was Babagana Kingibe and everybody was in one or the other; you just have to have an accommodation". If you have problems comprehending this balderdash, you are in good company. Finally, Babangida reminded us that as a Nigerian he had "a right to vote for any candidate of his choice," never mind the fact that he denied millions of Nigerians who voted on June 12, 1993, the benefit of their vote.

Asked why he orchestrated the return of Olusegun Obasanjo to rule Nigeria again in 1999, the self-styled Evil Genius said, "The need to save Nigeria from a looming crisis gave rise to bringing back Obasanjo". According to him, "We have to simplify a lot of things without going back to what happened before; the emergence of Obasanjo came about as a result of what happened in the country; the country was in a very serious crisis and we had to find the solution to these problems and therefore we needed a leader known in the country, we did not believe in foisting somebody who is not known; so, we looked for a man who has been involved in the affairs of this country, who held positions either in the military or in the cabinet and who has certain beliefs about Nigeria. Now, all of us that were trained as soldiers, there is one belief that you cannot take away from us; we believe in this country because this is part of our training. We fought for this country, so when you have a situation like that, you need a leader that has all these attributes and quite frankly, he quickly came to mind".

What Babangida failed to mention was his role in the crisis that led to foisting Obasanjo on Nigerians.

It is important we deconstruct IBB because we, as citizens, are central to understanding his newfound penchant for democracy and the rule of law. For those too young to remember and those who have conveniently forgotten, IBB was the military president of Nigeria from August 27, 1985 to August 27, 1993. He claimed he overthrew the Muhammadu Buhari regime for its highhandedness even though, as Chief of Army Staff, he was very much a part of the regime.

IBB immediately embarked on a charm offensive by abrogating Decree 4, the anti-press law of the Buhari regime. He freed the two journalists that had been imprisoned under the decree. He also released from prison Second Republic politicians who had been jailed by his predecessor. He insisted on being called president. His desire was granted. Babangida launched a transition programme to return the country to civil rule. By the time he was through with the media and Nigerians in general eight years later, one editor, Dele Giwa, had been letter-bombed to smithereens, several military officers executed, hundreds of anti-SAP and pro-democracy activists murdered, a presidential election annulled and the country left prostrate and polarised as never before.

IBB achieved notoriety for his transition, one of the longest, the most expensive (gulping over N40bn at the time) and certainly the most convoluted political transition the world has witnessed. As a prelude, he set up a Political Bureau made up of some of the finest minds the country had produced. The bureau came up with a document which IBB tossed into the waste bin. He then set out to do things his own way, based on his fanciful study and knowledge of the two-party system.

He set up two political parties, the SDP and the NRC, the former "a little to the Left" and the latter, "a little to the Right"; built two national secretariats for the parties, two secretariats in each state and two secretariats in each local government. After banning those he termed "old breed politicians", he then proceeded to assign politicians to each party based on his whims. It was a grand vision, except

that it was not meant to be. Today, those edifices, where they have not been taken over by "smart" Nigerians, are home to rodents and "area boys".

I have gone this far to show what Babangida did when he had the golden opportunity to set the country on the right path. The high point of his infamous transition was the June 12, 1993, presidential election won by Moshood Abiola who was later murdered while in detention. On June 23, 1993, IBB, through his goons, announced the annulment of the election. On August 27, 1993, exactly eight years after he seized power, Babangida "stepped aside", leaving his evil alter ego, Sani Abacha, in charge. The rest, as they say, is history. June 12 this year marks the 20th anniversary of Babangida's failed diabolical two-party experiment. The country has come full circle. The remnants of that perfidious era, including David Mark, who now holds court as the Senate President of the Federal Republic, call the shots in our so-called democratic order.

Babangida's recent outburst is a sad reminder of the true character of the Nigerian state; a state built on a feeling of entitlement. Two decades after he and his cohorts annulled the sovereign will of Nigerians, IBB unabashedly tells us that they did it to save us from ourselves. This feeling of entitlement that makes IBB and his ilk think they have a divine right to rule or determine who should rule us is our greatest undoing as a nation. Babangida, in his wisdom, handpicked Obasanjo without caring what majority of Nigerians thought or felt. After eight ruinous years, Obasanjo selected Umaru Yar'Adua to succeed him. Today, we are stuck with an oddity we never bargained for.

IBB's sins are numerous. It may be uncharitable to hold one person responsible for the problems of a nation; but more than anyone else, Babangida ought to take the biggest blame for the current crisis facing the country. Someone should please tell him that the formation of the APC is not about Nigeria operating a two-party system. It is about a much greater need which IBB does not and would probably never understand.