

The Orkar Failed Coup of April 22, 1990

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Shortly after dawn broke on April 22, 1990, the following broadcast was heard over the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) in Lagos:

"Fellow Nigerian Citizens, On behalf of the patriotic and well-meaning peoples of the Middle Belt and the southern parts of this country, I, Major Gideon Orkar, wish to happily inform you of the successful ousting of the dictatorial, corrupt, drug baronish, evil man, deceitful, homo-sexually-centered, prodigalistic, unpatriotic administration of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. We have equally commenced their trials for unabated corruption, mismanagement of national economy, the murders of Dele Giwa, Major-General Mamman Vatsa, with other officers as there was no attempted coup but mere intentions that were yet to materialise and other human rights violations.

The National Guard already in its formative stage is disbanded with immediate effect. Decrees Number 2 and 46 are hereby abrogated. We wish to emphasise that this is not just another coup but a well conceived, planned and executed revolution for the marginalised, oppressed and enslaved peoples of the Middle Belt and the south with a view to freeing ourselves and children yet unborn from eternal slavery and colonisation by a clique of this country.

Our history is replete with numerous and uncontrollable instances of callous and insensitive dominatory repressive intrigues by those who think it is their birthright to dominate till eternity the political and economic privileges of this great country to the exclusion of the people of the Middle Belt and the south.

They have almost succeeded in subjugating the Middle Belt and making them voiceless and now extending same to the south. It is our unflinching belief that

this quest for domination, oppression and marginalisation is against the wish of God and therefore, must be resisted with the vehemence.

Anything that has a beginning must have an end. It will also suffice here to state that all Nigerians without skeleton in their cupboards need not to be afraid of this change. However, those with skeleton in their cupboards have all reasons to fear, because the time of reckoning has come.

For the avoidance of doubt, we wish to state the three primary reasons why we have decided to oust the satanic Babangida administration. The reasons are as follows:

(a) To stop Babangida's desire to cunningly, install himself as Nigeria's life president at all costs and by so doing, retard the progress of this country for life. In order to be able to achieve this undesirable goals of his, he has evidently started destroying those groups and sections he perceived as being able to question his desires.

Examples of groups already neutralised, pitched against one another or completely destroyed are:

- (1) The Sokoto caliphate by installing an unwanted Sultan to cause division within the hitherto strong Sokoto caliphate.
- (2) The destruction of the peoples of Plateau State, especially the Lantang people, as a balancing force in the body politics of this country.
- (3) The buying of the press by generous monetary favours and the usage of State Security Service, SSS, as a tool of terror.
- (4) The intent to cow the students by the promulgation of the draconian decree Number 47.
- (5) The cowing of the university teaching and non-teaching staff by an intended massive purge, using the 150 million dollar loan as the necessitating factor.

(6) Deliberately withholding funds to the armed forces to make them ineffective and also crowning his diabolical scheme through the intended retrenchment of more than half of the members of the armed forces.

Other pointers that give credence to his desire to become a life president against the wishes of the people are:

(1) His appointment of himself as a minister of defence, his putting under his direct control the SSS, his deliberate manipulation of the transition programme, his introduction of inconceivable, unrealistic and impossible political options, his recent fraternisation with other African leaders that have installed themselves as life presidents and his dogged determination to create a secret force called the national guard, independent of the armed forces and the police which will be answerable to himself alone, both operationally and administratively.

It is our strong view that this kind of dictatorial desire of Babangida is unacceptable to Nigerians of the 1990's, and, therefore, must be resisted by all.

(b) Another major reason for the change is the need to stop intrigues, domination and internal colonisation of the Nigerian state by the so-called chosen few. This, in our view, has been and is still responsible for 90 percent of the problems of Nigerians. This indeed has been the major clog in our wheel of progress.

This clique has an unabated penchant for domination and unrivalled fostering of mediocrity and outright detest for accountability, all put together have been our undoing as a nation.

This will ever remain our threat if not checked immediately. It is strongly believed that without the intrigues perpetrated by this clique and misrule, Nigeria will have in all ways achieved developmental virtues comparable to those in Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, India, and even Japan.

Evidence, therefore, this cancerous dominance has as a factor constituted by a major and unpardonable clog in the wheel of progress of the Nigerian state. (Sic) It is suffice to mention a few distasteful intrigues engineered by this group of Nigerians in recent past. These are:

- (1) The shabby and dishonourable treatment meted on the longest serving Nigerian general in the person of General Domkat Bali, who in actual fact had given credibility to the Babangida administration.
- (2) The wholesale hijacking of Babangida's administration by the all powerful clique.
- (3) The disgraceful and inexplicable removal of Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, Professor Tam David-West, Mr. Aret Adams and so on from office.
- (4) The now-pervasive and on-going retrenchment of Middle Belt and southerners from public offices and their instant replacement by the favoured class and their stooges.
- (5) The deliberate disruption of the educational culture and retarding its place to suit the favoured class to the detriment of other educational minded parts of this country.
- (6) The deliberate impoverishment of the peoples from the Middle Belt and the south, making them working ghosts and feeding on the formulae of 0-1-1- or 0-0-0 while the aristocratic class and their stooges are living in absolute affluence on a daily basis without working for it.
- (7) Other countless examples of the exploitative, oppressive, dirty games of intrigues of its class, where people and stooges that can best be described by the fact that even though they contribute very little economically to the well being of Nigeria, they have over the years served and presided over the supposedly national wealth derived in the main from the Middle Belt and the southern part of this country, while the people from these parts of the country have been completely deprived from benefiting from the resources given to them by God.

(c) The third reason for the change is the need to lay a strong egalitarian foundation for the real democratic take off of the Nigerian state or states as the circumstances may dictate.

In the light of all the above and in recognition of the negativeness of the aforementioned aristocratic factor, the overall progress of the Nigerian state a temporary decision to excise the following states namely, Sokoto, Borno, Katsina, Kano and Bauchi states from the Federal Republic of Nigeria comes into effect immediately until the following conditions are met.

The conditions to be met to necessitate the re-absorption of the aforementioned states are as following:

- (i) To install the rightful heir to the Sultanate, Alhaji Maccido, who is the people's choice.
- (ii) To send a delegation led by the real and recognised Sultan Alhaji Maccido to the federal government to vouch that the feudalistic and aristocratic quest for domination and operation will be a thing of the past and will never be practised in any part of the Nigeria state.

By the same token, all citizens of the five states already mentioned are temporarily suspended from all public and private offices in Middle Belt and southern parts of this country until the mentioned conditions above are met. They are also required to move back to their various states within one week from today. They will, however, be allowed to return and joint the Federal Republic of Nigeria when the stipulated conditions are met.

In the same vein, all citizens of the Middle Belt and the south are required to come back to their various states pending when the so-called all-in-all Nigerians meet the conditions that will ensure a united Nigeria. A word is enough for the wise.

This exercise will not be complete without purging corrupt public officials and recovering their ill-gotten wealth, since the days of the oil boom till date. Even in these hard times, when Nigerians are dying from hunger, trekking many miles to work for lack of transportation, a few other Nigerians with complete impunity are living in unbelievable affluence both inside and outside the country.

We are extremely determined to recover all ill-gotten wealth back to the public treasury for the use of the masses of our people. You are all advised to remain calm as there is no cause for alarm. We are fully in control of the situation as directed by God. All airports, seaports and borders are closed forthwith.

The former Armed Forces Ruling Council is now disbanded and replaced with National Ruling Council to be chaired by the head of state with other members being a civilian vice-head of state, service chiefs, inspector general of police, one representative each from NLC, NUJ, NBA, and NANS.

A curfew is hereby imposed from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. until further notice. All members of the armed forces and the police forces are hereby confined to their respective barracks.

All unlawful and criminal acts by those attempting to cause chaos will be ruthlessly crushed. Be warned as we are prepared at all costs to defend the new order.

All radio stations are hereby advised to hook on permanently to the national network programme until further notice.

Long live all true patriots of this great country of ours. May God and Allah through his bountiful mercies bless us all."

As is fairly typical with military rebellions, by the time this broadcast was being made on the radio waves, much had already transpired over the course of the night - and more violence was to come before it was eventually crushed about 12 hours later.

In the days preceding the rebellion, seeing as planners felt that the plot had leaked, military retirees were hurriedly recruited, predominantly from Benin City in then Bendel state. They then mostly made their way to Lagos unobtrusively in public transportation. The uprising reportedly began at about 12.30am on April 22 when, having met for final briefing, allegedly by Major S. Mukoro at a civilian warehouse in Isheri/Ikorodu area (allegedly owned by Great Ogboru), the storm troopers fanned out to their destinations. Mukoro, a Military Police officer with a PhD in Law, was at that time the Military Assistant to the Director of Army Staff Duties and Plans (DASP), a position second only to the Chief of Army Staff at Army Headquarters.

This insider leverage as a staff officer in the headquarters may have given him "reach" in putting the plot together. But it was also reported by newspapers that such was the degree of compartmentalization ensured by Major Mukoro during the recruitment phase that many of the plotters met for the first time that night. Nor did they rely on normal military transportation. Instead they had civilian J-5 buses provided to shunt them around.

The first task under the circumstances was to secure weapons. This they accomplished by first taking control of an armory at the military police dominated barracks at Apapa. A Sergeant apparently accomplished this crucial first phase. He then arrested Colonels Ajiborisha and Odaro both of whom were transported to Ojo cantonment and detained along with Major Said who was then commanding the Army HQ provost battalion at Ojo. [All these officers were later rescued].

Next, subgroups headed for the FRCN radio station, Bonny camp, Dodan Barracks, Ikeja cantonment and Ojo cantonment primarily to get additional heavy caliber weapons and active duty soldiers as well as seize these locations as they boot-strapped the operation. There are unconfirmed reports, for example, that the armory of the 126 Guards Battalion

at Bonny camp was "liberated" by a small group of ex-servicemen led by Major Orkar himself. Then there is the interesting angle of the case of one Lt. Obasi (who later escaped). He allegedly went to a guardroom where some soldiers were in detention for various unit offences and released them to participate. Most did but some did not. Some of the plotters were already pre-positioned on routine guard duty at both the radio station and Dodan Barracks (formerly State House, Ribadu road) - the seat and home of the President. Lt. Okekumatalo of 123 Infantry Battalion was on duty at the Radio Station.

2/Lt A. B. Umukoro, was also on Armoured corps official duty at the radio station but was not initially involved in the plot. Lt Okekumatalo arrested him and most of his armored guard detail. Thereafter, Major Mukoro gave the arrested armoured corps officers a pep talk and recruited most of them into the scheme.

Thus, with Okekumatalo's inside job, the Radio Station proved to be a walkover initially for Major Mukoro, Lt. Col Nyiam and Captain Empere who secured the use of one of the fully armed armored vehicles there. Lt. Col Nyiam has been projected in the Press as being primarily responsible for the seizure of Dodan Barracks and the arrest of the President but he has never confirmed this. When the assault on Dodan Barracks began he had reportedly already been in and out on a 'routine' visit to old friends and was rumored to have been engaged in a game of draught with the President's ADC. Those who know will hopefully someday reveal the details of how it was all contrived. Publicly available accounts, however, suggest that at the start of the operation, one Lt. Uchendu reportedly grabbed an armored vehicle from the State House and drove to the radio station. This may have been the commotion that first alerted Babangida's household. When he arrived there, he and Umukoro were then sent back (by Major Mukoro) in a convoy to attack the residential quarters at Dodan Barracks.

The shelling of the State House apparently followed the shooting death of Lt. Col. UK Bello after he had openly identified himself as the ADC to the President. Captain Empere (who was actually a Military Police officer) reportedly took one of the armored

vehicle co-conspirators had secured from the radio station at Ikoyi back to Ikeja cantonment and used it (almost single handedly) to practically take over the cantonment, which froze in awe, paralyzed by the element of surprise and the ferocity of the shooting. He is said to have shot at and maneuvered around all opposition until he ran out of fuel. His main target, however, which was to get a hold of keys to the Main Battle Tank transit shed, failed. This failure to secure control of or neutralize the main battle tanks (such as the T-55s) and get additional light tanks at Ikeja cantonment is thought to be the primary reason the coup eventually failed because those same Tanks were later used to provide superior firepower in support of loyal troops when General Abacha bounced back. Captain Dakolo on the other hand was reportedly an instructor at the Army Depot in Zaria. However, he had only just been posted there from the 123 infantry battalion at Ikeja cantonment. Thus he was quite familiar with many of the soldiers in the battalion. On the night of the coup, therefore, he was able to approach the cantonment gate without suspicion whereupon he allegedly opened fire on the guard detail. Some soldiers reportedly fell, dead or dying, while others fled. The bus (or buses) carrying other conspirators thus drove into the cantonment without resistance. Incidentally, an innocent officer (of similar ethnic/state background) who just happened to be passing by got into an argument over what had just transpired and was also allegedly summarily shot. Newspapers further reported that one Major Edosa and a Capt Tolofari of the Military Police reportedly led the initial seizure of Ojo cantonment. They both escaped when in the early hours of daylight they started losing control.

DODAN BARRACKS

The assault on Dodan Barracks was in two phases. First, several Tanks deployed on the grounds were technically demobilized through the removal of firing pins. Later, the assault on the main living quarters (using infantry and two armored vehicles from the radio station driven by 2/Lts Umukoro and Uchendu) began.

Earlier, when certain movements were noticed, the ADC to the President, Lt. Col Usman K. Bello came out to investigate. Without any supporting crew, he reportedly tried to climb into one of the Tanks which, unknown to him, had already been disabled. Having

realized that he was in no position to use the Tank he came out, and tried walking alone, wearing mufti, toward the radio station, only to be summarily shot in circumstances that have never been fully clarified.

The details of what really transpired at the State House have since become a source of minor controversy. During an interview with the Vanguard on Sunday Feb 25, 2001, General Babangida (rtd) was quoted as saying: "I had a routine and I went up, I was just about dozing when my wife said something was happening and from my window I saw it all. I wasn't frightened. I was a soldier and I took my rightful place on that fateful day. It was, however, my wife and children who found the whole incident horrifying. .."I have been at the war front and I know what it means. I have escaped a lot of ambushes. In fact, there are a lot of pellets in my body. What I have gone through in life has toughened my heart. So, there is no question of fear, in fact it doesn't come in..".

More recently, General Babangida revealed on Galaxy Television, Ibadan that one Captain Kassim Omowa insisted on him leaving or being evacuated from Dodan Barracks. He is quoted as saying: "Omowa insisted that he would fly me out. But on each mention, I told him no because he was too junior to command me.....But the young man said: "I am here to do my job. So I must move you out of this place."

According to Babangida, Omowa evacuated him via a secret channel to a location (ostensibly a private residence in Surulere) "where I was for some days while the heat remained." Babangida did not shed light on other accounts that he was physically "knocked down" or "grabbed", smuggled via the Ribadu back gate and maze of adjoining buildings and compounds, tucked inside a Volkswagen beetle and hidden at the National Arts Theater, Iganmu from where he made contact with Abacha and others.

It has also been reported that one of his bodyguards was later captured by the plotters but did not betray his location. None of this has been confirmed by authoritative sources. Babangida's former Chief Press Officer, Chief Duro Onabule, however, went public with another version last year. According to him, while commotion was brewing, Babangida

"remained calm in the sitting room. All pleas for him to leave the place by the security staff failed, he simply refused. Even when the shots were coming closer from Obalende side, he still would not leave. As I said, he remained calm under the fire, but the saving grace was his wife, who physically dragged him out, and I mean physically dragged him out. Even then, IBB did not leave the premises, he stayed at the gate of Dodan Barracks; all pleas for him to leave the place, he refused. When the pressure mounted, he then asked the security people, who were asking him to leave, 'okay I appreciate your concern, but if I am to leave, how about these poor boys defending me,' so he stayed there, until the whole thing was brought under control. Before he then left for the house."

Regarding the death of Lt. Col Usman K. Bello, Lt. Col. Gabriel Anthony Nyiam, formerly of Nigerian Army Engineers, then a Directing Staff at the Command and Staff College, Jaji, and the most senior officer involved in the uprising, (who is said to have been Col. Bello's course mate and personal friend) was quoted in an interview with the Sunday Vanguard Newspaper published on April 16, 2000:

"Let me state clearly, may the soul of U.K. Bello rest in peace. It's sad that U.K. Bello had to die because he was in effect used by IBB as a distraction and the poor chap was misled to be pushed out of Dodan Barracks that night, when Babangida already knew that there was danger. Babangida used U.K. Bello as a bait."

But slightly over a year later, with a slightly different spin, on Friday 17th August, 2001, it was reported in the same Vanguard newspaper interview noted above that Chief Duro Onabule, former Chief Press Secretary to President Ibrahim Babangida, told correspondent Paul Odili that Babangida "was as usual receiving visitors late into the night, but just as the last visitor left, he heard one gun fire. Maybe that was a signal for the coupist to commence operation, but he was the one who first got to know. And he summoned his ADC (U.K. Bello) and demanded to know what was going on; the ADC said nothing sir.' He told him 'don't be stupid son,' something is going on, go and find

out. And the ADC came back to report that they were under attack. Of course, the duty of ADC was to counter whatever attack against them."

THE RESISTANCE

LAGOS...Flag Staff House

Flag Staff House in Ikoyi, Lagos, (now called Defence House) had traditionally always been the official residence of the GOC, Nigerian Army and later the Chief of Army Staff. However, when he added the title of Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff to his Army title, Lt. Gen. Sani Abacha held on to the residence. This was the position when the coup plotters struck in the early hours of the morning of Sunday, April 22, 1990.

As was his usual nocturnal practice **Lt. General Sani Abacha** was wide awake but busy with "extra-curricular rest and recreational activities" at a guesthouse nearby. Thus, when the plotters (led by one Lt. Ogboru of Military Police, then a Law student at Uniben) arrived at his official residence he was not available.

A quick follow-up check at his nearby guesthouse (which they were aware of) was unproductive because although they fired heavily upon the guards and building they did not do a room-to-room mopping up operation. Abacha was inside, alive and well. This lack of close quarter follow-up probably saved his life - and the regime.

The late Abacha's first son (the late Ibrahim) is rumored to have driven to find his father at the guesthouse once the plotters left. With mayhem around him, Abacha reportedly deliberated calmly for about 10 minutes, calmly got dressed and emerged (in mufti) with two Uzi submachine guns - one of which he handed over to his son whom he noticed was carrying a "mere" pistol.

Thereafter, Abacha ordered his son to sit in front as the driver of a civil Peugeot 504 while, he, Sani, the Army chief, sat as the right side front seat passenger. Two security operatives occupied the back seats. Then, in what was clearly an extremely dicey move, Abacha ordered his son to drive back to the Flag Staff House where Abacha gave orders to secure the perimeter.

At that point he knew that the plotters had not cut off telephone lines nor had they disrupted nationwide army signals networks, so he began making phone calls to other service chiefs and more specifically, Army commanders in Lagos (particularly Bonny Camp and Ikeja Cantonment) and other parts of the country to get information, alert those who were ignorant of unfolding events, convince those who thought he had been neutralized that he wasn't, and secure pledges of loyalty.

Like a pilgrimage, officers later began trooping to the Flag Staff House to account for themselves and declare loyalty. Once fairly confident of the localized nature of the threat, he then gave firm orders that the coup was to be resisted at all costs. There is word that some officers specifically sought confirmation about Babangida's state of health before clearly committing themselves to Abacha's destiny in those tense and uncertain early hours. Others simply ran away or lay low.

As word got around that both Abacha and Babangida were indeed alive, galvanized by the curious and unprecedented "expulsion" of certain 'far' northern states on radio, confidence was restored, wills stiffened, and officers and units that would otherwise have been disposed to take a "wait and see" attitude or perhaps even run away, tilted toward the regime.

Once armored vehicles at Ikeja were firmly under the control of pro-Abacha elements, Ikeja cantonment was retaken (**by Brigadier Ishaya Bamaiyi**) and the push to regain control of all other major military barracks in the Lagos area began. A young Lt. of the Recce battalion, for example, led the operation that went to Ojo cantonment to rescue those officers detained there.

In mustering troops to retake Dodan Barracks and the radio station, the 126 guard infantry battalion at Bonny camp under Lt. Col Ghandi Tola Zidon, the 9th infantry Brigade under Brigadier Ishaya Bamaiyi, and the Recce unit at Ikeja (armed with Scorpion Tanks, Panhard armored cars and some Main Battle Tanks in transit to other locations in the country) reportedly formed the spearhead. They were supported by key AHQ elements like the Corp Commander, Artillery, **Brigadier Chris Abutu Garuba**

and the Director of Armor, Colonel Abubakar Dada both of whom placed additional units within and outside Lagos on standby in case the need arose.

Lt. Col. GT Zidon in particular was said to be familiar with Major GG Orkar, a fellow middle belter. It is said that he dressed in tracksuit and jogged his way to the radio Nigeria station in Ikoyi to chat him up and lull him into a false sense of security while actually using the opportunity to conduct an appreciation of the troop and weapon strength and disposition of the plotters.

Having done so, he later returned with troops, supported by armor, to flush them out from the radio station. I have no independent official confirmation of this newspaper account.

But to those familiar with the history of coups in Nigeria, the Abacha-Zidon-Orkar liaison, if true, was a similar - but not identical - replay of the Danjuma-Babangida-Dimka liaison of 1976 and the Ironsi-Nwawo-Nzeogwu liaison of 1966. In each case an officer friendly with the coup spokesman went to him on behalf of the Army Chief making arrangements to crush him.

The first attempt to reach and dislodge the coupists at the radio station was carried out by a group of soldiers from the 126 Battalion Bonny camp reportedly led by one Lt. Jalingo. They were repulsed near the Obalende bridge flyover, by 2/Lt Umukoro in an armored vehicle. At least one soldier died in the hail of co-axial MG fire. The others were later co-opted at gunpoint by Major Mukoro and made to make mini-broadcasts in pidgin English and vernacular, praising the coup.

KADUNA, KANO, JOS, ENUGU AND IBADAN

Even though Orkar, Nyiam, Dakolo, and Idele, all principal plotters, were either based in Jaji, near Kaduna, or Zaria, the April 22 plotters made no concrete arrangements to neutralize units outside the Lagos area - probably because of the stage of planning at which it was preemptively launched as a contingency to avoid arrest (according to

Nyiam). The coup plan was predicated on the presumption that once Babangida and Abacha were out of the way and Lagos units neutralized, the regime, based as it was on these "twin godfathers", would implode like a pack of cards.

Nevertheless, in seeking to crush the plot, prevent a domino effect, and reestablish the authority of the federal military government, Lt. Gen Abacha reached for all operational elements in all Army divisions all over the country directly (by phone) and indirectly through resident State Governors.

What transpired in the 1st Division is the most detailed account publicly available. In Kaduna, the GOC 1st Div, Major General Ike Nwachukwu was on leave. His Colonel GS, (and acting GOC) Colonel Mohammed Dansofo began contacting Brigade Commanders in the 1st Div area of responsibility (Kano, Sokoto and Minna). In this manner he contacted the most senior officer in the Division, then **Colonel Mohammed Chris Alli**, Commander of the 3rd Infantry Brigade in Kano, for guidance. Dansofo knew then that there was a coup in progress in Lagos but did not know who was involved or its political coloration. The Kano State Governor, Colonel Idris Garba and **Lt. Col Lawan Gwadabe** calling in from Lagos also independently contacted Alli. It was not long before Orkar's broadcast on radio Nigeria resolved any initial confusion about the putsch. All Brigades were placed on full standby combat alert and all passes cancelled. Based on a dictation made over the phone by Col. MC Alli, Col Dansofo made a counter-broadcast on Radio Kaduna thus:

"We of the 1st Infantry Division disassociate ourselves from the coup and its aims and affirm our loyalty to the President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida."

MC Alli also made an unambiguous broadcast to the people of Kano dissociating his Brigade from the Orkar announcement in Lagos.

In Jos, Enugu and Ibadan, the GOCsn apparently issued a similar radio message but at least one announcement by one GOC was allegedly vague, avoiding the specific mention of Babangida as C-in-C by name, pledging generic loyalty only to the "Federal Military Government" rather than the regime. Some pundits later interpreted this omission as a cunning, "wait and see" safeguard in case the coup eventually succeeded.

GENERAL ABACHA's BROADCAST

After the radio station in Lagos was regained by loyal troops, there was a brief announcement by Lt. Col. GT Zidon followed by the following broadcast by Lt. Gen. Sani Abacha:

"I, Lieutenant-General Sani Abacha, Chief of Army Staff, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, have found it necessary to address you once again in the course of our nation's history. In view of the unfortunate, development early this morning, I'm in touch with the CGS, Service Chiefs, GOCs, FOCs, AOCs, of the armed forces and they have all pledged their unflinching support and loyalty to the federal military government of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida who is perfectly safe and with whom I am in contact.

"Early this morning there was sporadic firing by a few disloyal and misguided soldiers in some isolated parts of Lagos, followed by an embarrassing radio broadcast.

"Fellow Nigerians, you will all agree with me that the reasons given for this grave misconduct are significantly motivated by greed and self-interest. The soldiers involved decided to constitute themselves into national security nuisance for no other cause than base avarice.'

'Most of these disloyal elements have been arrested and are already undergoing interrogation. The remaining dissidents are advised in their own interest to report to the nearest military location and hand over the arms and ammunition in their

possession. All formation and unit commanders are hereby directed to exercise effective command and control. "At this stage, let me reiterate our commitment to pursue vigorously the transition programme. No amount of threat or blackmail will detract the federal military government's attention in this regard. We are set to hand over power to a democratically elected government in 1992. I wish to assure all law-abiding citizens that the situation is now under control and people should go about pursuing their lawful interest.

"Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

"Thank you."

GENERAL BABANGIDA'S BROADCAST

A broadcast was also made by President Babangida:

"Fellow Nigerians, I salute you all, first and foremost, let me assure you further that the unfortunate situation of this morning in some parts of Lagos has been brought under control by loyal troops as earlier stated by the chief of army staff and chairman, joint chiefs of staff, Lieutenant-General Sani Abacha with whom I have been in contact and he is with me this evening.

"I also want to seize this opportunity to commend all members of the Nigerian armed forces the Nigeria police and security agents for the gallant and professional manner the situation was contained.

"Let me also congratulate the civil populace for their continued support for this administration. I wish to state that all law-abiding citizens should go about their normal duties and their safety guaranteed. Let me also assure the diplomatic community and all foreigners in the country that the security of their lives and property is hereby guaranteed.

Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Thank you for your co-operation."

ESCAPE FROM RADIO NIGERIA

Isolated and surrounded, with the coup clearly headed for failure, the most senior officers involved, Lt. Col Nyiam and Major Saliba Mukoro initially contemplated a suicide pact, but then escaped from the radio station and eventually left the country for exile in Britain and the US respectively.

Great Ogboru, the civilian alleged to be a key co-factor, also slipped out of the country to Europe. Mukoro later became an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at a University in the U.S. Security agents detained and hounded those elements of their respective families left behind. But unconfirmed reports later suggested that on Major Mukoro's wife simply walked away from supposed house arrest at Ikeja cantonment in Lagos and found her way abroad. Great Ogboru's brother was jailed and it is said that even after fully serving his jail term, General Abacha refused to release him.

How did Mukoro and Nyiam escape from Radio Nigeria?

According to Col. Nyiam, in a 2000 interview with the Guardian:

"At the point of battle when we had, as it were, allowed all soldiers loyal to us to engage, we decided that we would walk like officers out of that zone with the resolve that it will be better to be shot standing than crawling. And we walked, there was no disguise. How we walked out of the encirclement is what I called the mystery and I give that glory to where it belongs....I will say that when we left the zone of the conflict itself between 1.00 and 2.00 a.m., here again we give credit to the poor Nigerians around the shore of the new third mainland bridge.

There were a lot of poor people who lived there, who lived in the shanties. Those people immediately created a force to ferry anybody involved in the action across the water to the other side and I must say that when we got there they were so

generous that even in the heat of it all when they were giving us water to drink, they felt that their water was too dirty for me to drink and they went and bought mineral - that shows you the generosity of the poor.

They felt we were too good to drink their water so they gave us soft drink. It was these same poor people who became our scout and helped us to walk through Isale Eko and thereafter when we got to a point on the old Carter Bridge, we asked them to go back and we walked on foot. Again, there were soldiers, how they did not see us - that credit goes to God. In cases where soldiers, the police and other forces saw us, they ignored us and even helped us to go through. In effect, people should not be over critical of the police or disown soldiers because many of them have been suffering from the same problems average people go through. In summary, the mystery and experience of this body and mind talking to you and Mukoro is only but a demonstration of God's power."

COURTS-MARTIAL

Major Gideon Gwaza Orkar was arrested along with about 300 other military personnel and more than 30 civilians. In the usual Nigerian pattern of mass arrests and reactive witch hunting, some journalists considered unsympathetic to the regime were also detained and newspapers even closed.

Following a Board of Inquiry, cases were referred to a Military Tribunal chaired by Major General Ike Omar Sanda Nwachukwu. The Chief Prosecutor was Brigadier General Tunde Olurin while Lt. Col. Akin Kejawa led the defence.

In July 1990, Major GG Orkar and 41 others were convicted for treason and executed by firing squad after confirmation of sentences by the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). Nine other defendants were jailed while 31 soldiers were acquitted.

Following a serious controversy inspired by allegations made by some of the convicts - as they were about to be shot - that those acquitted by the first tribunal were fellow putschists acquitted on ethnic grounds, the AFRC ordered the retrial of 31 of the surviving accused by a new tribunal headed by Major General Yohanna Yerima Kure.

The Chief prosecutor this time around was Lt. Col. Kemi Peters while Lt Col JOJ Okolagwu led the defence.

In September 1990, therefore, a second batch of 27 executions was carried out. It has been said that the core Bendel (Edo/Delta) and Rivers (Rivers/Bayelsa) plotters were not remorseful about the rebellion. Captain Empere in particular was very defiant and identified the late Isaac Adaka Boro as his mentor and hero. He and others were driven by deeply held feelings that although their exploited lands produced Nigeria's oil wealth, their people had little to show for it. It is fair to categorize the rebellion, therefore, as a "resource control uprising".

SOME ADDITIONAL BIOSKETCHES

Major GG Orkar

Major Gideon Gwaza Orkar was Tiv from Benue State. He started his officer cadet training at the NDA in 1972 with the 12th Regular Combatant Course.

He was commissioned in December 1974 in the rank of Second Lieutenant and posted to the Nigerian Army Armoured Corps School in Ibadan. He did particularly well on the Armour Young Officers course and was later sent for some specialized courses in gunnery. Indeed he was recognized as a gunnery expert by his colleagues.

There is an unconfirmed story that as a subaltern, he was once granted six months seniority over his colleagues based on outstanding performance representing his commanding officer back in the seventies.

As a junior officer he also attended several courses in the Nigerian Army School of Infantry. He was on the first Nigerian contingent that was sent to Chad Republic and he later served in the 22 Armoured Brigade.

He passed both the junior and senior divisions of Staff College with flying colours. His last posting was as a member of the Directing Staff of the Command and Staff College.

Major GG Orkar was said to have been recruited into the plot just a few weeks before April 22, 1990.

Lt. Col Gabriel Anthony Nyiam

GA Nyiam attended primary school in Lagos before going to the Nigerian Military School in Zaria. He subsequently attended the Nigerian Defence Academy as part of the 9th Regular Combatant Course, beginning in January 1971.

Upon completion of his program at NDA he was inducted into the Corp of Engineers. He attended Earthwork University in Edinburgh and undertook a second degree at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. During this period he was seconded to the British Army, where he says he imbibed the culture that "soldiering is an honourable profession in the defence of the weak".

When he returned to Nigeria he joined General Babangida's staff at the AHQ. He was a staff officer at the AHQ until just before the putsch when he was posted to the Command and Staff College at Jaji as a Directing Staff.

Lt. Col UK Bello

Lt Col Usman K Bello was an indigene of Niger State. Gwari by tribe, he started his Officer Cadet training with the 9th Regular Combatant Course in January 1971 at the Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna. He was commissioned in the rank of Second Lieutenant in June 1973 and posted to the Recce Regiment.

He attended several courses in the Nigerian Army School of Infantry and some Armour officers' courses in Britain and the United States.

He was ADC to Brigadier SM Yar Adua when the latter was Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters. He was also the Brigade Major 24 Armoured Brigade before he proceeded to the Command and Staff College (CSC) for his Senior Division Course. At CSC he did very well and came first in order of merit.

Bello was not a university graduate but he put all his energy into making a career of the army. His last posting before being deployed to Dodan Barracks was as the CO of the Recce Battalion in Kaduna. As a Lt Col, he replaced Major MS Dasuki as ADC to President Babangida. Even as ADC he sought permission to undergo airborne training in the Nigerian Army School of Infantry. This was not a normal practice for one at his age and rank

Bello commanded tremendous amount of respect from all ranks. The President had a lot of confidence in him.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UPRISING BY LT. COL. GA NYIAM

(For full details, see Guardian and Vanguard newspapers dated April 15 & 16, 2000)

What was the objective of the April 1990 rebellion?

According to Lt. Col. G Anthony Nyiam, who was the most senior officer involved in the uprising (but not the leader), the aim was "to have a caretaker government with a view to do two things at that time. One was to do a proper national census and a proper election and also set up a framework for a national conference."

In an interview with the Sunday Vanguard Newspaper published on April 16, 2000, Nyiam also said "With that in mind, we never had any idea that we were going to govern anybody. It was just to restore power to the people. That is to restore democracy. Our aim was that there was going to be a caretaker committee which was going to be headed by a former minister under President Shagari."

How did Nyiam get involved?

Nyiam volunteered information that he was recruited into the conspiracy in February 1990 "when some junior officers approached me to express their discontentment with the system...Because, I did not completely trust them, I did not give any word whether I would support the plan or not. Instead, I started to watch them. I watched them for about one month to see if they were serious or the intention was to set me up. These were young officers who really meant business because they were full of zeal. Because of their enthusiasm and anger, they were anxious that the coup be carried out almost with dispatch. But, I continually urged restraint as what they wanted would not have given room for much planning. Eventually, we came in to try to reorganize and look at things, how we could do it better. But, along the line, the action leaked. We had envisaged the possibility of a leakage and had, as a result of that, put in place contingency plan so that we would not be arrested like General Mamman Vatsa and co."

How did the plot leak?

"The details of the contingency plan was that we would move if the coup plot leaked. And true to what we thought, several days before action was to be carried out, our

intelligence reports indicated that the plan had leaked. This obviously forced us to immediately take up arms." He went on: "In fact, another senior officer, a mate of mine who was the link between the young officers and myself, eventually sold out, that is, he was the source of the leakage. When we realised that our plans had leaked, that led to the pre-emptive action we took. I remember we took our action without any arm, it was in that night that our resources were got by first of all taking over Apapa."

Why was the so called "Far" North excised from Nigeria?

On the question about the excision of some far northern states, Nyiam said: "If you read our speech (on the coup), you will find out that our position was based on the presumption that the then Sultan was imposed on the people of Sokoto and that the act was the beginning of the destruction of the traditional institution. The act ostensibly destroyed the Sokoto caliphate by causing division between the two houses. It was on the basis of this that we said that state would not be re-absorbed (if we had succeeded in taking over government) into the country until that traditional stool had been restored to the proper person. If you read the conditionalities, you are likely to discover that what we were saying was that sultanate would not have fitted into the new order that we envisaged. We did not see the action as a coup but as an uprising, to correct some anomalies."

But in a separate interview with the Sunday Guardian newspaper, Nyiam was also reported as having 'defended the coup broadcast in which some states in the far North were exercised from the country, saying he is more convinced now that the action was proper. He said: "We saw it coming [excision]. After the Mamman Vatsa's coup attempt, I travelled with Abacha within the country to meet traditional rulers and Army Commanders to speak to soldiers. Anytime we went to the Hausa areas in the North, we were given Hausa and Islamic regalia and if you didn't wear it, they would not be happy with you. It got to a stage that if you were in the Army, you have to speak Hausa. What I am saying in effect was that, there was a gradual acculturation of other people who have superior culture." '

What was Nyiam's relationship with General Babangida?

Nyiam was reported (by the Sunday Guardian) to have admitted being an "IBB boy". The newspaper said: "The former military president, he added, commissioned him to

work on a diarchy based on Egypt's Abdel Nasser model where the military, produced the president while the civilians produced the prime minister. Explaining that it was part of the self-succession agenda of Babangida and the late Abacha, he said that being so close to Babangida, he had access to privileged information which showed that the former military president was not at all in a hurry to quit the political stage except by an uprising.'

Further, Nyiam, explaining his initial attraction to the former President, also stated that: "In a nutshell, we all came in to help Babangida whom we thought was a man who meant well. If one goes back to his earlier contribution, he was doing very well and we all gave him our support. But then, when we saw the things that were coming up; things like the way people from the South were being marginalised, in NNPC; how Ebitu Ukiwe was thrown out of power to make room for Abacha, and a host of other things that happened. It was also at this period that the OIC thing started. All these put together made one reason that one cannot just be an officer in name and watch his people being marginalised or being made victims or killed. At the time also, Dele Giwa was murdered."

CONSEQUENCES OF THE APRIL REVOLT

Like all failed coups before it, the April 1990 coup led to certain reactive (i.e. witch hunting) measures by the military against the services, units or corps that were thought to have been deeply involved in it. Military Police Battalions were downsized. A similar phenomenon occurred after the Vatsa conspiracy. However, this angle is outside the scope of this article.

In his seminal work "The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army", Major General Mohammed Alli, former Chief of Army Staff, who as a Colonel in Kano had dissociated himself and his Brigade from the coup, described the Mukoro/Orkar et al coup as one "imbued with undue radicalism."

He opined that in execution, the revolt "suffered communication disconnection" (whatever that means) but that it had nevertheless "shaken the nation and the northern hegemony to their very foundation and fabric." Alli says that the 1990 coup, "like its predecessor in 1966" opened "a more precarious and frightening chapter, pointing to and

crying for fundamental changes in the nation's political structure and the basis of existence and control of the Armed Forces." However, "as soon as it was subdued and suppressed, the nation went back to business as usual."

One obvious consequence to civilians was the acceleration of the movement of the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja in 1990 by the Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida. It was also reported by some pundits that he was rattled by the experience and lost a considerable amount of self-confidence for quite some time. This temporary newfound humility extended to some of his apologists but it was also mixed with passive-aggressive behaviors driven by fear and insecurity.

The failure of the coup, however, marked the beginning of the rise of Lt. Gen. Sani Abacha who was now increasingly being referred to in the Press as the Khalifa (successor). Whatever anyone said of him, few could doubt his ferocity and deliberate calm under conditions of extreme danger that befell him on April 22. He had proved his mettle. As former Panamanian dictator General Noriega once said: "The ultimate sign of virility is the ability to hold on to power."

It was widely acknowledged that Abacha could quite easily have taken power for himself if he wanted - although he was not highly thought of by so called 'IBB boys'. Clearly, Babangida owed him plenty and became increasingly beholden to his attitudes - particularly since there was some discussion of the merits and demerits of Babangida's abandonment of Dodan Barracks - albeit involuntarily.

Another officer who benefited from the failure of the April rebellion was Brigadier Ishaya Bamaïyi of the 9th Brigade. He was rewarded with the Command of the Brigade of Guards and it marked the beginning of his eventual ascendancy into the rarified atmosphere of service chiefs. It is also possible that Major General Chris Alli's eventual emergence as the first Chief of Army Staff under General Abacha may have been influenced by the standing he gained with the "caucus" during this coup attempt. According to Kunle Amuwo, who carried out a research project on General Babangida's "personal rulership" project, the 1990 rebellion, coming as it did in the setting of Babangida's "permanent transition" undermined his credibility and may have been a factor in the way the public reacted to the deaths of over 150 middle grade officers in a subsequent C-130 plane crash in 1992. Amuwo holds the opinion that 'Even though

Babangida lamented that "a whole generation of young officers (mainly Majors) has been wiped out" by the air crash, the public thought his government may have had a hand in it. During their trials, Major Gideon Orkar and his men reportedly told the military tribunal that their coup was in three layers; that unless all young officers were killed, there was no hiding place for the regime. Over 160 officers perished in the crash. That the public tended to give credence to this story is, itself, a measure of lack of trust in the General as his "tenure" dragged to an end.' The public's reaction to the gutting by a suspicious fire of the Ministry of Defence building in 1993 followed similar lines.

But there were other consequences. Although most people dismissed the so called conditional expulsion of the "far" north as a silly gamble, according to Professor Julius Ihonvbere, the coup forced certain "deep-rooted" conflicts and "critical issues" to the front page of the national discourse. Never too distant from national institutional memory anyway, right from the days of the 1957 Willink Commission report, the Ifeajuna/Nzeogwu insurrection of January 15, 1966, the Isaac Boro "Niger-Delta" rebellion, the Petroleum and Land Use Acts, these were to play out in later years as the Ogoni crisis, small concessions by Babangida on the 'onshore-offshore' issue, creation of OMPADEC, June 12 imbroglio, and more recent undercurrents of the "Sovereign National Conference", "Power Shift", "Resource Control", "Federalism", and "Sharia" polemics.

There are observers who say that these fault lines in Nigerian politics portend an inevitable earthquake. I prefer the nuanced Chinese interpretation (as was once observed by the late President Kennedy) - that every crisis presents both danger and opportunity.

CASUALTIES OF THE REBELLION

A full accounting of the dead and injured from the April 1990 rebellion is not yet possible, in part because of the secretive nature of events surrounding the incident. However, it is widely assumed to be the bloodiest attempt to seize power in the history of Nigeria.

EXECUTED (incomplete list)

Major Gideon Gwaza Orkar

Captain N Harley Empere

Captain Perebo A Dakolo
Capt AA Nonju
Lt. AE Akogun
Lt. CN Odey
Lt. Cyril O Ozualor
Lt. NEO Deji
2/Lt AB Umukoro
2/Lt EJ Ejesuku
SSgt Julius Itua
Sgt Martins Ademokhai
Sgt. Pius Ilegar
WO2 Monday Bayefa
L/Cpl Francis Ogo
L/Cpl Jepta Inesei
Cpl. Sunday Effiong
L/Cpl Sam Mbakwe
L/Cpl Albert Ojerangbe
L/Cpl Godfrey Deesiiyira
L/Cpl Emma Oyemolan
Sgt. Stephen Iyeke
Cpl. Joseph Efe
WO Afolabi Moses
L/Cpl Idowu Azeez
WO Jonathan Ekini
S/Sgt Solomon Okungbowa
Private Richard Iseghoei
Private Egwolo Makpamekun
L/Cpl Edogamen Friday
S/Sgt Jolly Agbodowi
Sgt. Etim Umoh
L/Cpl Sam Obasuyi

Ex. Serviceman LC Otajareiri
Ex. Pvt Osazuwa Osifo
Ex. Pvt CP Wasiu Lawal
Ex. Pvt Peter Unuyoma
Ex. Pvt Synalman Goodluck Emefe
Ex. S/Sgt Samson Idegere
Pvt. Emmanuel Onoje
Trooper Roland Odogu
Corporal Lateef Awolola
Pvt. Dickson Omenka
Corp Ehietan Pius
Private Iroabuchi Anyalewechi
Private Henry Eguaoyi
L/Cpl Martins Odey
L/Cpl Sunday Asuquo
Trooper Celestine Ofuoku
Pvt. Anthony Korie
Pvt Thomas Angor
Pvt Edem Basi
Pvt Joseph Odey
Trooper Obioma Esiworo
L/C Magnus Ekechi
WO2 Godwin Donkon
Sgt. Ojo Adegboyega
Pvt Peter Abua
Pvt. Phillip Akamkpo
Sgt. Shehu Onleje
Corp Olanrewaju Ogunshola
L/Cpl Luka Yang
Trooper Malkily Ayogu

L/Cpl Andrew Onah

Michael Ebeku

OTHERS (At least 69 were officially executed, so this list is incomplete)

KILLED DURING FIGHTING

Lt. Col. UK Bello (General Babangida's ADC)

Lt. killed during altercation at Ikeja cantonment gate

3 - 5 soldiers at Ikeja

Captain Charles Idele (Idele was one of the coup leaders. He was Military Assistant to the Commandant, School of Infantry, Jaji. He left Jaji and came to Lagos to partake in the coup. His corpse was reportedly found wearing the uniform of a Major on the grounds outside Ikeja cantonment gate where he was shot by loyal troops.)

OTHERS (numbers unknown, from fighting at Dodan Barracks, Obalende and the Radio Station)

JAILED

L/Cpl Ezekiel Akudu

Pvt Ibrahim Egwa

Sgt. John Alilu

Sgt. Andarich Eladon

L/Cpl David Amo Amo

L/Cpl Vitalis Udzea

DISMISSED

L/Cpl Celestine Nebo

L/Cpl Wapami Adigio

L/Cpl Mike Odeniyi

L/Cpl Kingsley Aromeh

Sgt. Lawrence Ademola

Signal Man Fatai Daranijo

Pvt. Godwin Airomokha

Sgt. John Benson

L/Cpl Vincent Ozigbo

L/Cpl David Oke

RETIRED OR DISCHARGED FROM THE MILITARY

An unknown number of soldiers and officers were discharged or retired from the military in a subsequent purge. The highest ranking of these was a Brigadier (from Bendel) who held the office of Director of Army Staff Duties and Plans. His career ended by virtue of the fact that Major Saliba Mukoro (widely presumed to be the leader of the rebellion) was his Military Assistant. The Brigadier was never charged, never found guilty of involvement, and was even reportedly involved in putting down the revolt. But in the Byzantine world of dog eat dog military politics; the so-called "caucus" organized his departure from the Army.