

## Nigeria: Atiku, Kalu, Tinubu - Obja's Political Nightmares

Lagos)

OPINION

6 May 2007

Posted to the web 7 May 2007

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Lagos

Like every soldier, President Olusegun Obasanjo was trained to dominate his environment whenever he is in control. It is common knowledge among those conversant with military tactics that whenever soldiers move into a place, they conquer it and leave tell tale signs of their conquest. Nigeria's outgoing President may have maximally applied this military method in operating the nation's democracy in the last eight years.

That is why in the last five years or so, Obasanjo may well have been synonymous with Nigeria and the ruling PDP and vice versa. But that such posturing has however not gone unchallenged by a few who dared to look at the President in the eyes without blinking. Among these few are Vice President Atiku Abubakar, Governor Orji Uzor Kalu and Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

Curiously, the trio represent the old tripod of the Nigerian nation: North, East and West. Coincidentally too, their names end with the same alphabet. With Atiku moving from PDP to AC and Kalu from PDP to PPA, they are of different political persuasion, but they are united by a common cause: Obasanjo's personified democracy.

Atiku

Until they fell apart midway into the administration's second term, it was a rosy, if not near perfect relationship that existed between Obasanjo and Atiku. The smooth relationship was much to the discomfiture of certain personalities among the northern elite who felt the Vice President was too subservient to his boss.

In demonstration of his confidence in the number two man, while Obasanjo was frequently travelling abroad during the regime's first term to launder Nigeria's image, Atiku was practically in charge of the economy.

The privatization programme of the Federal Government was his primary responsibility. All this was not to last for long due to conflict of political ambition. While Obasanjo was seriously engrossed with a second term, Atiku was already nursing an ambition to succeed the President in 2003.

The calculation in Atiku's camp was for Obasanjo to adopt the Nelson Mandela's option and pave way for Atiku to take over. Mandela only served one term as post apartheid South Africa president after which Thabo Mbeki, his deputy succeeded him. Such suggestion did not go down well with Obasanjo and his men.

That ambition engendered suspicion of Atiku. From then on, he was regarded as one not to be trusted. This gave rise to high level intrigues in the presidency over Obasanjo's running mate for second term. It was more of political expediency rather than free will choice that made the President to eventually settle for his vice as running mate in 2003. So glaring was this that when he declared his ambition to run for second term, the President was silent on the issue of running mate.

Even the 2003 victory did not douse the flame of suspicion which Atiku's ambition had ignited. This was carried over into the administration's renewed term of office. It was from that point that an otherwise rosy relationship began to rupture since Atiku would not let up on his quest to succeed Obasanjo, the relationship did not improve. In fact, it went from bad to worse and eventually blew open in the public domain.

For an administration which felt it deserved to continue what it considered its good works, Obasanjo wanted a tenure elongation. This, of course, was antithetical to Atiku's ambition. From rumour, the third term plot became a reality much to the chagrin of many. Its proponents took their campaign to the media, but its opponents fought back.

By this time, the Vice President had indicated his ambition to run for Presidency. He soon became the arrow head of anti-third term campaign. All this while, Obasanjo maintained studied silence on the issue. To frustrate the ambition in its entirety, Atiku took his campaign against tenure elongation to

the domain of international community. At different fora, he informed his audience how the Nigerian nation was stalked with a President unwilling to relinquish power.

With a sustained campaign against it at home and abroad, the tenure extension project was killed on the Floor of the National Assembly as the Constitutional Amendment which would have facilitated it was thrown overboard by majority votes in both legislative chambers.

Soon after the defeat of the unpopular quest, an open confrontation ensued between the President and his vice. It became obvious that Obasanjo did not want Atiku to succeed him. Atiku on his part would not give up. The face-off snowballed into blackmail or sort. The Vice President was accused of diverting the Petroleum Technology Development Fund, PTDF, into private use.

An Administrative Panel was constituted and a verdict of indictment was returned. With that, Atiku's political fate was temporarily sealed with a hurried gazette of the indictment. The implication was that he had been frustrated because he had been disqualified by the Constitution. What followed was a dirty media war between the nation's first two citizens. Dirty revelations of secret deals with public funds were traded on the pages of newspapers. While the mudslinging from the Presidency would not abate, some called for the resignation of the two. Such call was probably not out of place. Never in the history of Nigeria had the elevated office of the President and Vice President been brought so low.

## About the Author

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