Living Under Illusion (2)

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It is mere wishful thinking and very dangerous for any Nigerian leader to dismiss the possibility of Nigeria breaking up and does nothing to nip in the bud the factors that encourage the growth of fissiparous tendencies among the people. But that was what former President Olusegun Obasanjo did with America’s National Intelligence Council, NIC, report. Perhaps, his comments in the letter he forwarded to the National Assembly along with the NIC report, set the tone for deliberations in the two chambers of the federal legislature. Unfortunately, most members of the Sixth National Assembly were carried away by emotions. In their own reasoning, the report was a calculated work of an enemy who did not wish Nigeria well. Others dismissed the report outright as a figment of America’s imagination. There were also others who refused to reason and only resorted to calling America all sorts of names. They also accused the George Bush administration of openly and actively working to ensure that Nigeria would be a failed state in the near future as it predicted. The same dismissive attitude prevailed in the northern political circle. The argument then was that there was nothing on the ground at that time to suggest that Nigeria could break up in the near future. This is also the current position of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. In his maiden media chat with some journalists on the network service of the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, last September, he used the case of Igbo men who live and own property everywhere in the country to support his argument that nobody wants Nigeria to break up because that would not be in anybody’s interest. Most senators who were debating the state of the nation on the eve of this year’s independence anniversary also agreed that there was nothing whatsoever to indicate that Nigeria could break up now or in the near future. Only a few Nigerians still regard the NIC report as a divine message God passed to Nigeria through the Americans. They insist that it is ill-advised to dismiss the report outright as some of our political leaders are inclined to do or even view it as one of those evil designs of the US against Nigeria. Rather, they advise that our political leaders should take pains to do a critical analysis of the report and use that as the basis to examine if there are possibilities that the various flashpoints in Nigeria today could destabilise it in the next 15 years if nothing is done to address the issues that brought them about. I share their viewpoint and feel that those who still believe that the NIC report is a figment of America’s imagination are living in self delusion . They are also not good students of Nigerian history. For instance, the Niger Delta crisis which is still lingering, was predicted as far back as 1957 by the Henry Willink’s Minorities Commission which the British colonial administration set up to ascertain the fears of the minorities over their future in an independent Nigeria. The Commission confirmed their fears which had not been adequately addressed since then. To avert a potential crisis situation, it recommended certain measures that must be taken to allay their fears. That timely warning and recommendations were ignored by the then federal government and its successors. Consequently, Nigeria paid dearly for that negligence several years later. Today, Jos, a once peaceful city to live in, has become an interminable killing field over who is an indigene and who is not. If anybody had warned Nigeria some years back of that possibility, nobody would have taken him seriously let alone take immediate steps to avert the crisis. Some years back, the United States of America had intelligence report that Nigeria had become a training ground for Al-Qaeda terrorists and warned our leaders against it, did they take the warning seriously ? Dismissing that report did not change the facts on the ground. But the reality stared us in the face after the Boko Haram carried out serial bomb attacks in the country including the August 26, 2011 suicide bombing of the United Nations’ house in Abuja. Marilyn Ogar, spokesperson of the State Secret Service, SSS, later confirmed that the terrorist group had links with Al-Qaeda. Did we ever believe that there could be suicide bombings in Nigeria? Who knows what will follow Boko Haram between now and 2020? The national political reform conference set up in 2005 by Obasanjo, perhaps, offered Nigeria the best opportunity to put its house in order so that what is predicted in the NIC report would not come to pass. But we bungled it because of stiff-necked opposition to fiscal federalism and resource control by some northern delegates to the conference. As a result, that conference ended abruptly after South- South delegates walked out of the second plenary session in anger on June 14,2005. That unfortunate development sent out clear danger signals then that if the Niger Delta problems and other injustices elsewhere in the country are not adequately addressed before 2020, what becomes of Nigeria then would be anybody’s guess. The Americans read the danger signals deeper than Nigerians by warning the authorities to act fast before it is too late. However, all is not yet lost. Nigeria still has another opportunity to shape its future and avert the doomsday prediction. That is, if members of both chambers of the National Assembly approach the proposed constitutional amendment with a sense of patriotism and also listen to the strident demands of Nigerians for a people-oriented constitution. Such a constitution must restore Nigeria to the path of true federalism by drastically reducing the power and responsibilities of the federal government as contained in the exclusive and concurrent legislative lists. This will minimise the struggle for the control of the centre which often results in the overheating of the polity. The country will develop faster than it does now if states and local governments are given more funds and saddled with greater developmental responsibilities. After all, the regions held more attractions than the centre in the First Republic and that was why there were no do-or-die struggle to be there. Above all, if the struggle to be in government at all costs is to be reduced to the barest minimum, the anti-corruption agencies must be empowered to fight corruption and punish offenders irrespective of whoever is involved . If Nigerians who get into public offices are made to realise that government is not an avenue for quick ill-gotten wealth but a platform for selfless public service, the fight to finish to be there will reduce. This will attract honest people to go into government and perform. Only good governance, social justice and strict adherence to the rule of law can save Nigeria. And if our leaders are not thinking along this line, they are merely living under an illusion. Concluded SMS:08023880068