

A case for impeachment

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By Okey Ndibe

Here's what Craig Timberg of the Washington Post wrote on April 2 about President Olusegun Obasanjo's third term ambition: "Obasanjo, a born-again Christian in a country split between Christians and Muslims, said that God would decide whether to extend his time as president." Then the reporter quoted the president: "I also believe that God is not a God of abandoned projects. If God has a project, He will not abandon it."

Obasanjo may deceive a foreign reporter, but Nigerians are far less likely to swallow this cheap bit of false, misconceived piety. In fact, this president invokes God only when he means to play god. Judging by his imperial conduct, the president must view himself as god the father, Tony Anenih and Ahmadu Ali as twin gods the sons, and Ibrahim Mantu as god the unholy spirit. Nigerians are by now all too familiar with the portents of presidential sanctimoniousness.

The latest presidential deployment of "god" is all redolent of what transpired in 2003. Those who have watched this presidency will recall how, in the build-up to the 2003 "general riggings," a group of women from the ruling PDP had gone to sound out the president on his plans. He sent them away with the creed that he was waiting to hear from "god." A few

months later, the women went back to Aso Rock to find out if the president had heard from heaven. Obasanjo's response was that his ears were still open, awaiting divine instructions. In a twist worthy of Kafka, the women then revealed that "god" had spoken to them. And their god's decree was that the president should seek re-election.

If anybody had any doubt that the habitual invocation of divinity was a grand fraud, it was soon dispelled by the turn of events. Nigerians were shocked and awed by one of the most unconscionably rigged elections in human history. In the president's home state of Ogun, he polled several hundred thousand more votes than his party's governorship candidate. This despite the fact that the two elections were held the same day! Some constituencies in the nation recorded close to 100 percent of voter turnout, with the ruling party snatching more than 95 percent of the votes. Indeed what passed for elections in 2003 was a perfidious violation of all sacred rules of elections. Even so, a president who uses the vocabulary of warfare to describe elections, a man who is capable neither of irony nor a sense of shame, ascribed his bewildering landslide to "god's doing."

One uses the small letter for divinity rather advisedly. For it has been clear to me for a while that when Obasanjo declaims god he really refers to himself. Truly devout men and women must cringe with embarrassment at the iniquities, the crimes, the evil acts that Nigerian politicians, led by the president, claim that their god authored. Does the president believe for a second that God would decide to extend his tenure beyond 2007? Absolutely not! He has put his trust in the usual pantheon of questionable gods bearing names like Anenih, Ali, and Mantu. He has thrown his lot with human deities who are incapable of moral discernment, indeed gods whose particular specialization is hanky panky, manipulation, the fixing of scams and shoddy deals.

With each passing day, the president's men-gods demonstrate the bankruptcy of the case for third term. Instead, they provide ample proof that the nation's agenda ought to be the impeachment of a president who has made a sport of breaching the constitution he swore to uphold and defend. Nigerian newspapers are awash with reports of clandestine as well as open meetings at which PDP chairman Ahmadu Ali threatens the party's legislators with rustication if they oppose a third term for the president. There are reports of Ali and Ojo Maduekwe, another party operative, promising legislators choice parcels of land in Abuja, millions of naira as well as guarantees of automatic returns to their seats if they cast a vote to elongate the president's tenure. There are accounts that thirty-seven thousand dollars greased the palm of each "co-operative"

member of the Mantu-led joint committee that met in Port Harcourt to recommend a third term for the president.

Some well-meaning Nigerians have appealed to the National Assembly to roundly reject the president's vain dream. The legislators should do more, much more than resist the president's temerity. They actually should not wait until the third term scheme thuds its way to their chambers for a vote. In issuing threats and offering gratification to legislators to approve an unpopular third term amendment, the president's managers have committed serious crimes. There is no question that, if those opposed to the president's plan had used similar tactics to galvanise legislators, the police and agents of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) would have swooped down on them. But since the crimes are being committed by Obasanjo's partisans, the president will never censure them. Here is a president who beats his chest and proclaims that he never offers bribes to anybody; yet, he affects nonchalance when inducements are vicariously offered to serve his untoward ambition.

Part of the tragedy of Obasanjo's Nigeria is that the police have been transformed into instruments of illegal schemes. You can bet that Inspector-General of Police Sunday Ehindero will not arrest those employing corrupt means to fetch Obasanjo a third term. But there's no excuse for the National Assembly not to awaken to its duty. Its members should commence the impeachment of a president whose methods are as illegal as his goal is nefarious.

Nigeria is faced with dire challenges. The oil-rich Niger Delta is in a virtual state of war. Yet, Obasanjo's response is to mire the nation in the distraction of third term. When the nation ought to be focused on addressing its serious political crises, it is rather bogged down in a ruse. Nigeria's lone subject is one man's overweening ambition; the citizenry is compelled to talk about the president's will-o-the-wisp. It does not matter that Nigerian roads are deathtraps, that the nation's hospitals are a joke, its schools, from bottom to top, in a shambles, its cities and towns have no power supply, its youths are bereft of hope. What is the president doing about these deep, deepening problems? Practically nothing. He's transfixed by his own messianic delusions.

It is time the National Assembly rescued Nigerians from this cul-de-sac. Nobody who monitors Nigeria can be in any doubt about where Nigerians stand on the depraved idea of third term. It is a notion from hell itself. It is rightly disdained by the vast majority of Nigerians. Despite the efforts of Obasanjo's police to harass those who came out in droves during the farcical public hearings to disavow third term, the sentiment was powerfully conveyed.

It is now incumbent on the National Assembly to disabuse the president and his henchmen who are pathetically obsessed with posing as gods. It is the height of demagoguery for the president to refer to "god" a matter that Nigerians are competent to handle, and have pronounced on in a decisive,

unquestionable manner. The president's handlers, to be sure, are flaunting a lot of raw cash. True, they are making many sweet promises, including ridiculous ones. Still, the members of the National Assembly ought to realize that the very fate of their nation is at stake. Their duty is historic, and it lies in keeping faith with the majority of Nigerians. They should move the national conversation away from the effete matter of a president who imagines that his selfish interests are coterminous with the nation's aspirations. In order to stop all this worthless talk about third term, they need to start acting on impeachment.

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Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

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