The Nigeria Example

Career Progression Analysis and Military Biographies (C NF)

Analysis of world politics in the late 1990s reflects the struggle to find usable concepts with which to understand events now that the Cold War era is over. The question of how to explain what is happening is being answered in academia, in think tanks, and in the press by references to the growth of technology, the emergence of a more interconnected global economy, and even the waning of the nation state itself. (U)

Despite these new analytic trends, the ability to understand world politics, even in these uncharted times, can benefit substantially from a reinvigorated effort to use an old tool: biographies. At a time when ideology no longer influences the actions of world leaders to the extent that it once did, it is more important than ever to know who leaders are as people. Whether the issue is Boris Yeltsin’s health or Jiang Zemin’s ability to control the Chinese Army, biographical intelligence and analysis play an important role in international affairs. (U)

In this regard, Africa biographical analysis is perhaps even more important because institutional development in most countries there is so weak that decisions and events are much more a product of individual personalities than in other parts of the world where government bureaucracies play a determining role. Moreover, biographical analysis is especially important in Africa because the political cast of characters in most African countries tends to be small and enduring, suggesting that, once biographical analysis is done, it can have a long shelf life. (U)

African personalities in the news have been around a long time. Laurent Kabila, the successful Zairean insurgent commander, went into opposition in eastern Zaire in 1968. Similarly, Charles Taylor, the Liberian warlord and presidential aspirant, was in opposition during the Tolbert regime and was a government procurement agent during Head of State Doe’s tenure. In Nigeria, General Abacha has been a key figure in practically every Nigerian coup in recent memory. (U)

Need for a New Look

In the past, biographical sketches have often focused mainly on the top civilian and military leadership, especially those figures with whom US policymakers would personally interact. A key objective centered on highlighting personal strengths and weaknesses so that policymakers might recognize possible ways to influence their counterparts. This kind of analysis is still important. When biographical research focuses on the dynamics of groups, however, it can be even more useful to policymakers because it then has the potential to provide an understanding of the underpinnings of an individual’s leadership. This helps a policymaker form realistic expectations as to what kind of policy initiatives are likely to succeed. (U)

Furthermore, even though the number of military governments seems to...
be declining, military officers, active duty and retired, serving in go-

guernments merit closer scrutiny. They do not always fit current stereotypes
depicting them as thugs bent solely on their own enrichment. Military
personalities are no less complicated than their civilian counterparts, and
they may have more diverse and cosmopolitan backgrounds. Many are
also better educated and experienced in leadership than the civilians are.
(U)

The Chronology of Careers

Career progression analysis is useful and valuable to the analyst’s efforts
to obtain an accurate reading of military personalities. It involves looking
at an individual’s professional assignments and activities over a period of
time to see whether these details exhibit a trend or a pattern. Because
it consists mainly of the chronological ordering of career events (similar
in many respects to an employment résumé), it seems simple and uninter-
esting. It is, however, a practical technique for organizing what can
prove to be large amounts of detail in a way that reveals a career’s
dynamic, if there is one to be dis-
cerned, and it also can provide insights that may not otherwise be
apparent. (U)

Unlike many social science models
and explanatory frameworks, career
progression analysis requires immers-
ion in the details of an individual’s
personal history, and this involves a
certain amount of subjective judg-
ment as to how to order or group the
data. For example, what criteria are
to be used to establish career periods?
Begin with a person’s age? The kinds
of assignments he pursues? His rank
progression? His linkages to mentors,
patrons, and cliques? Or the admin-
istration of different heads of state
under whom he served? Each case
will be unique, even though similarities
among individuals will emerge,
regardless of the criterion used. (U)

While career progression analysis
helps immeasurably to illuminate the
background of a single individual, it
can be especially useful when applied
to a group. Shared experiences which
serve to bind individuals together
and create group cohesion then
become more visible. (U)

The Case of Nigeria

In the context of the Nigerian officer
corps, such factors as an officer’s
experience in Nigeria’s civil war
(1967-70), his education and training
(both in Nigeria and overseas),
and experience in peacekeeping oper-
ations, such as the Economic
Community of West Africa Cease-
fire Monitoring Group in Liberia,
are particularly important. Ethnicity,
religion, and regional loyalties have
long been used to assess the dynam-
ics of the Nigerian officer corps.

The possibility of applying career
progression analysis to an entire
officer corps is greatest for countries
where biographical data has accumu-
lated for a period of many years and
where it exists for a broad range of
personnel. This is the case for Nige-
ria. (U)

The Rise and Fall of Colonel
Gwadabe

The career of Nigerian Col. Lawan
Gwadabe, a Hausa and a Muslim,
who is serving a prison sentence for
his role in the March 1995 coup plot
against the Abacha regime, provides
a good case study for career progres-
sion analysis. The three broad
periods of Colonel Gwadabe’s career
(Figure 1) are demarcated mainly by
Gen. Ibrahimi Babangida’s tenure as
Head of State (1985-93). Gwadabe’s
career flourished between 1985 and
1993, not the least because he sup-
ported the 1985 coup that brought
Babangida to power. Thus, a logical
principle to use in organizing the
events of Gwadabe’s career is that of
Babangida’s own tenure—before,
during, and after. (U)

With the data arrayed in this manner
and armed with some foreknowledge
of Nigerian history, Gwadabe’s
career can be seen to exhibit several
notable characteristics. First, he is
not a veteran of the Nigerian civil
war. Nigerian Army colonels of
Gwadabe’s age group represent the
next generation of Nigerian Army
general officers, and many lack first-
hand military experience in the war.
As a result, they are excluded from
the fraternity of war heroes, still a
major factor in the degree of respect which senior officers receive and in
the degree of influence they can wield over the officer corps. The
value of national cohesion, strongly held by senior officers in the current
regime, will be correspondingly weaker in this and succeeding genera-
tions. (U)

Gwadabe’s education and military training reveal a typical mix of domes-
tic and foreign experiences, with a prominent US aspect that is not lim-
ited to military institutions. His training background also shows the
predominance of armor, the sector of the Army Babangida favored. (U)

Third, and most important, the career period framework shows clearly that
Gwadabe’s career flourished under Babangida and that his assignments
progressed toward increasingly responsible political, rather than military,
jobs. In retrospect, his role in the Angola, Sudan, and Mozambique
peace processes appear to be the pinnacle of his career. Correspondingly,
his career declines under Babangida’s successor, General Abacha. His assign-
ments begin to fall more and more in the military sphere, until he is ulti-
ately convicted for his participation in the March 1995 coup plot. (U)

(b)(1)

A Soldier’s Soldier

Current Chief of Army Staff Maj. Gen. Ishaya Bamauiyi provides
another illustration of the application of career progression analysis.
An ethnic Zuru and Christian from northern Kebbi state, Bamauiyi
reflects the reputation of the Zurus for professionalism which has earned
them a special niche in the Nigerian Army. (U)

Using rank progression as the orga-
nizing principle, Bamauiyi’s three main career periods (Figure 2) are
that of company-grade officer, field-
grade officer, and general officer. As
a second lieutenant through captain,
Bamauiyi was occupied primarily with
small-unit commands at the level of
platoon and battalion. His military
training and education, unlike that
of Gwadabe, centered on the infan-
try. Abacha’s favored branch of the
Army. During this period, Bamauiyi
saw combat in the civil war. (U)

As a field-grade officer, Bamauiyi
begins to command units at the bri-
gade level, undertakes his first
training in the United States, and,
with his appointment as commander
of the Brigade of Guards, he begins
migrating toward the command of
units associated with the regime’s
security. As a general officer, his
training is largely complete, and he
continues to lead units important to
regime security with his assignment
as commander of the Lagos Garrison
Command. (U)

Unlike Gwadabe, whose military
career centered predominantly on
political jobs, Bamauiyi emerges as
more of a military professional. As
such, his case is especially interesting in that it contradicts the conven-
tional wisdom which holds that
Nigerian military heads of state
purge loyalists of previous regimes
when they come to power. To some
extent this is true, but Bamauiyi’s
career progression demonstrates
that “professional” as opposed to “politi-
cal” officers not only survive, but
also can flourish—an indicator of the
size and complexity of the officer
corps. Under Babangida (1985-93),
Bamauiyi commanded such key units
as the 4 Mechanized Brigade at
Ilorin, the 9 Mechanized Brigade at
Ikeja, and the Brigade of Guards at
Abuja. Thus, under Abacha, Bamauiyi
got even further. He commanded
the Lagos Garrison Command, and
he became Army chief of staff. (U)
Maj. Gen. Ishaya Rizi Bamaiyi

**Career Period I: Company-Grade Officer**

1968  
Attended the Nigerian Defense School (probably the Nigerian Defense Academy in Kaduna); commissioned as a second lieutenant.
Platoon commander, 68 Infantry Battalion, Onitsha, during civil war.

1969  
Adjutant, 9 Infantry Brigade, Training Wing; promoted to lieutenant.

1970-71  
Second in command, 184 Infantry Battalion; attended Military Training College, Kaduna (probably the Nigerian Defense Academy).

1971-75  
Commander, 181st Infantry Battalion and 183rd Infantry Battalion.

1973  
Promoted to captain.

1975  
Deputy Assistant Adjutant, 26 Infantry Brigade, Ilorin.

1976-77  
Commander, 70 Infantry Battalion.

1977-78  
Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, Nigerian Defense Academy, Kaduna.

**Career Period II: Field-Grade Officer**

1978  
Promoted to major.

1979-80  
Attended Nigerian Command and General Staff College, Jaji.

1980-81  
Commander, 72 Infantry Battalion, Makurdi.

1981-82  
Attended US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

1982  
Served on staff of Nigerian Command and General Staff College, Jaji.

1983  
Promoted to lieutenant colonel.

1985  
Deputy Commandant, Nigerian Army Depot, Zaria.

1986  
Commander, 4 Mechanized Brigade, Ilorin; promoted to colonel.

1986-90  
Commander, 9 Mechanized Brigade, Ikeja, Lagos.

**Career Period III: General Officer**

1990  
Promoted to brigadier general.

1990  
Commander, Brigade of Guards, Abuja.

1993  
ECOMOG Chief of Staff

1993  
Director of Operations, Army Headquarters.

1993  
Appointed Commander, Lagos Garrison Command.

1994  
Promoted to major general.

1996  
Appointed Chief of Army Staff

Figure 2
Career progression analysis is a particularly useful tool for analyzing the military leadership of countries in which the military has been, is, or may become an important influence.

In addition, both policymakers and analysts can gain insight into coups and coup attempts through the use of career progression analysis. The April 1990 coup attempt in Nigeria may have been instigated by professional officers who saw their careers set back by rewards to political sycophants, while the plot of March 1995 may have been the work of "political" officers such as Gwadabe who felt marginalized by the Abacha regime. (U)

Finally, while parochial influences of ethnicity, religion, and regionalism will always be a factor in the Nigerian military, career progression analysis shows that the military is a much more complex and sophisticated organization than these traditional factors lead one to believe. It provides insight into the country’s defense priorities and its foreign policy. In Nigeria, and perhaps in Third World countries in general, policymakers can expect that future politicians and government officials will be drawn in part from the ranks of the military which has afforded its officers on-the-job training as provincial governors, diplomats, and bureaucrats. (U)

Broader Applications

Career progression analysis is a particularly useful tool for analyzing the military leadership of countries in which the military has been, is, or may become an important influence. Indonesia is a good example of a country whose political dynamics could be illuminated by such analysis. The Indonesian military’s political role is longstanding, its role is legally codified by the concept of “dual function,” and it still holds leadership positions at all levels of government, including seats in parliament. (U)

The career progression technique can also be useful in analyzing leadership in countries that are moving to consolidate civilian rule. China, with which Nigeria is expanding relations, is perhaps a case in point. Although the military in China has largely “returned to the barracks” and the institutionalization of civilian rule is more developed than it is in Nigeria, some senior officers remain influential. If the military returned to power in the event of a security crisis or if civilian government collapsed, career progression analysis could assist analysts in judging how well military government would perform by showing the degree of international, political, and bureaucratic experience of the officers who have come to power. (U)