

Good Riddance, Buhari: You Came, You Saw, You Failed Woefully!

BY OLU FASAN

MUHAMMADU Buhari, president of Nigeria since 2015, will leave office on Monday, May 29, after eight disastrous years. The late Chief Bola Ige famously coined the phrase, "good riddance to bad rubbish". That, truth be told, is the best way to describe the exit of Buhari, his presidency and his government from power.

For the past eight years of Buhari's administration have been an unmitigated failure; a monumental waste of time, of resources, and of the hopes and aspirations of a nation and a people. True stewardship is leaving a place better than one found it. But Buhari is leaving Nigeria far worse than he found it in 2015. On any metric, Nigeria sunk deeper into an abyss under Buhari. Without a doubt, he's the worst civilian leader Nigeria has, so far, had! No previous civilian president showed such aloofness, such indifference, such arrogance, and such utter lack of competence and vision in governing Nigeria. None!

Before becoming president in 2015, Buhari had been a military Head of State. But he was so calamitous that his colleagues removed him from power within 20 months. Yet, he enjoyed the privileges of a former head of state: the highest national honour, GCFR, permanent membership of the Council of State, numerous financial and other material benefits, and the prestige of being treated as an "institution".

So, what else did Buhari want? Why did he want to inflict himself on Nigeria as president, despite his irredeemable leadership flaws and acute intellectual weakness?

A comparison with General Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's other military-cum-civilian leader, is the opposite. When General Obasanjo left office as military Head of State in 1979, he threw himself into policy analysis, founded the Africa Leadership Forum, a policy think-tank, engaged in international diplomacy, read and wrote. Obasanjo didn't plan to be president. Serendipitously, he became president in 1999. With his experience and exposure, he hit the ground running, embarked on radical institution-building, negotiated and secured debt relief for Nigeria. Obasanjo had flaws, but the inept or ineffectual government wasn't one of them!

By contrast, after his failed military regime, Buhari's consuming passion was to become a civilian president. But he did nothing to improve himself intellectually; nothing to develop a vision of governance, a vision for Nigeria. Indeed, according to the late Junaid Mohammed, an ally-turned-critic, Buhari "never read a book in his adult life". Yet, such an intellectually lazy person wanted desperately to be Nigeria's president.

So desperate, in fact, he entered into a Faustian pact to achieve the selfish, inordinate ambition. Buhari ran for president three times and failed! After the third attempt, he

wept on national television. Bola Tinubu's immortal words: "I told him, 'Don't cry. You will contest and win.'" But Tinubu had his price. If he helped Buhari to become president, Buhari would, once in power, help him to become president. Both traded the presidency of Nigeria between each other on the altar of personal ambitions!

In 1984, Buhari jailed Tinubu's ally, Bisi Akande, for 42 years for "unlawful enrichment of his party". If 2015 were 1984, Buhari would have jailed Tinubu for hundreds of years for far worse: state capture, unexplained and inexplicable wealth. But, no, 2015 was not 1984. In the intervening years, Buhari had become a politician and desperately wanted to be president. His famed non-sense anti-graft zeal, as a military ruler, had gone, and he was willing to make "a pact with the Devil" and sell his soul. That's how he became president!

But if someone was so desperate to be president and willing to compromise his values and fraternise with those he would have jailed for corruption in another dispensation, he must be pursuing power for power's sake. And truth is, power was an end in itself for Buhari. Otherwise, why was there no fidelity between what he promised when seeking power in 2015 and what he did after gaining power?

Take the seemingly mundane: trappings of power. Buhari had a reputation for asceticism and frugality with money, but, as president, became utterly profligate, spending like a drunken sailor, including on wasteful overseas trips. Buhari vowed to sell off some presidential jets but bought more and spent billions annually to maintain them. Buhari said his wife won't be called First Lady, yet created the Office of First Lady and lavishly resourced it.

Recently, Buhari gloated: "I got all I wanted." Of course, he did: for himself, his family, his cronies, and his party. But what about Nigeria? What about the majority of Nigerians? With N77trn or \$42bn debt, 22 percent inflation, and just 1.4 percent growth, Nigeria is economically worse under Buhari. With 63,111 killed since 2015, 133 million multidimensionally poor, and nearly 60 percent youth unemployment, Nigerians are socio-economically worse. Indeed, under Buhari, Nigeria became the "poverty capital of the world". Yet, despite his abysmal failure, Buhari craved praise-singing and basked in dishonest adulation.

Few weeks ago, two books were launched to honour Buhari. One, by Anthony Goldman, one-time Africa Editor of Financial Times, is titled, "State of Repair: How Muhammadu Buhari Tried to Change Nigeria for Good". The author couldn't bring himself to say Buhari "changed Nigeria", but "tried to", which is even false. But if Buhari hired a former Africa Editor of the FT to burnish his