NO LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: 
CORRUPTION AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria has become for long a reference point for corruption, and lately insecurity. The mindless looting of public funds, that is emblematic of governance in Nigeria, has proceeded apace with equally mindless destruction of lives and property, with palpable fear, and disenchantment pervading the land. The increasing sectarian strife has turned parts of the country into killing fields, with obvious threats on democratic consolidation and national stability. The festering sores of corruption and insecurity are inexorably related to the warped values. The paper contends that the nation is still mired in deep crisis of governance owing to misdiagnosis of the problem which renders nugatory the efforts of state agencies to checkmate the menace. The chronic nature of corruption and insecurity has been fuelled and sustained by perverted societal values. Nigeria faces an existential crisis and requires a reorientation of values and complete paradigm shift to be able to come out of the woods.

Key words – Corruption, Insecurity, Societal Values,

Introduction

In the middle 1990s, as Nigerians were faced with very severe hardship and uncertain future, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (a forum of Catholic Bishops) came up with prayers for Catholic faithfuals to be observed religiously in all masses and private prayers namely:

a) Prayer for Nigeria in distress and
b) Prayer against bribery and corruption.

It was very clear to the Catholic Bishops that the problems of corruption have become very serious and chronic that it required divine intervention, particularly, given the propensity of leaders at all levels to steal from the public treasury. Nigeria, to many, was on the threshold of extinction. Several years after, even with the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, corruption and insecurity have become pandemic (Ogundiya, 2010). The recent revelation emanating from the oil subsidy probe and the pension scam illustrate vividly how tragic the situation has become. The exact amounts involved are still subjects of controversy supporting Odinkalu’s (2010)
description of Nigeria as a country that cannot count. The effective functioning of a nation is predicated on “three processes

a) The processes of legitimate public power (election)

b) The processes of quantifying the demographic coverage of the country (census) and

c) The processes of estimating and distributing the commonwealth (public accounts, including revenues and appropriations)” (Odinkalu, 2010:12).

Elections, census figures, revenue figures have all been seriously compromised and flawed. Official statistics in Nigeria is but a fraud.

Corruption has become a way of life in Nigeria (see Transparency International, 2011). It is so pervasive that it permeates all aspects of our national life. It is found in all public institutions today, Civil Service, Electoral Commission, Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges, the Judiciary, Police, Military and other Security Organisations etc are all bastions of corruption. Until recently when the Inspector General of Police sent all policemen packing out of the Nation’s highways, it was common sight to see policemen extorting money publicly at gun point. What is armed robbery after all? Those who are courageous to resist have had sordid stories to tell, that is, if they survive. In the Judiciary, justice has come to be a cash and carry commodity given to the highest bidder. Lady Justice is no longer blind, but open-eyed engaging in a lustng kindred fraternity with those who grease her palms. Judiciary is no longer the last hope of the common man.

Nigeria is an amazing paradox, characterized by abject want and poverty in the midst of immense natural and human endowments. Nigeria is the 80th largest oil producer, and also, has the 6th largest deposit of gas worldwide. The country’s rich oil deposit has earned it more than 400 billion dollars in revenue since the 1970s (International Crisis Group Report, 2006). Regrettably though, much of these have been privatized creating a horde of very few nouveau-riche while the rest of the populace starve (Amadi, 2009). More than 60% of Nigerians live below the poverty line of one dollar a day (World Bank, 2011).

Given the propensity of Nigerian leaders to indulge in graft, it is not surprising that the nation is still plagued by gross underdevelopment. Basic social services including Medicare, good roads, pipe borne water, electricity, schools are notoriously inadequate. Living standards have considerably declined over the years, that the elderly look at the past with nostalgia and even say that their lives were better in the 1960s than today (see Nnonyelu, 2012).

The problem in Nigeria has become compounded with the spate of insecurity currently ravaging the land. In 2012 National Budget dubbed Fiscal Consolidation, Inclusive Growth and Job Creation, about one trillion naira was allocated to security, many times more than the provisions for education, health and other social services (FGN, 2012). Even with this monumental allocation to the Security Sub sector, Nigerians have not slept with their eyes closed as the country is violence infested. These range from arson, domestic violence, kidnapping, murder, politically motivated assassinations, to sectarian induced attacks and killings, and several other forms of violence that inundate the land (Albert, 2007, Akinwale & Aderinto, 2012). The Northern part of Nigeria has been under siege by persistent and precise deadly attacks led by a Sectarian Fundamentalist Group known as Boko Haram (Western Education is sin/forbidden). The country is boiling and seems to be at war with itself, with some prominent Nigerians like Theophilus Danjuma, a retired General and former minister of defence warning about the impending catastrophe – a reference to the failed state of Somalia. Nigeria is volatile. Indeed, the recklessness with which bombs are exploding daily may be correctly termed the iraqinisation of Nigeria (Nnonyelu, 2012). Its fragile unity is threatened by renewed ethno-
sectarian conflicts (see Gourley, 2012, Ojo, 2010). The ubiquity of these attacks means that the business of governance, of providing necessary amenities to the people, and improving their welfare cannot proceed unless the security situation is addressed (see Forest, 2012).

Given the entrenched nature of these problems in Nigeria, it may be pertinent to consider the interface between extant cultural values, corruption and insecurity, or whether corruption has become culturally embedded, domesticated or indigenized in Nigeria, which has in turn raised the spectre of insecurity. But before this is done, let us seek conceptual clarity.

**CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

1) **SOCIAL VALUES**: Broadly speaking, social values refer to commonly held principles, ideas or standards that are good, cherished by a given group of people and which the people make legitimate efforts to fulfil. Simply put, values refer to desirable conditions or state of affairs that are worth pursuing. Values mirror what a society considers important, significant that it devotes its energies (mental and physical) to realise the preferred state. What the people glorify, admire, applaud indicate to a significant extent what the values of that society are. In Nigeria today, the craze for materialism, i.e. to own several duplexes, have a fleet of state of the art cars, stupendous bank account, expensive dresses and jewelleries, travel to India to treat any manner of ailment even headaches, occupy political offices, are the predominant values (see Nnonyelu, 2009). That explains why some Nigerians do all sorts of things to get rich, even kidnapping their parents for ransom. The Nigerian society places so much premium on riches, wealth, no matter how ill gotten. The number of chieftaincy titles given to these men of wealth is an eloquent testimony to our regrettable attachment to money. We worship, glorify and adore money so much that anyone who is wealthy is seen as next to God. Even in the churches, he is respected, appeased, given the front seat, as the pastors try to outdo one, following the gospel of prosperity, while also rushing to possess private airplanes, Limousines and brand new cars. Values are people’s aspirations about the way things should be done, they are their reported preferred practises (House, Jaridan, Dorfman, and Hanges, 2007). Nigerians want everything for themselves, without really working for it. Nigerian values have been held hostage by vulgar materialism. Given the emergence of such a value orientation, a new national disease called the sudden wealth syndrome or “affluenza” has completely eroded our traditional values of hard work, dedication to duty, humility, honesty, love patriotism, sense of community and brotherhood (see Nnonyelu, 2009). In discussing the correlation between social values, corruption and insecurity, there is a tendency to situate corruption or insecurity in the given cultural matrix of a society. This has not been without controversy. However, we seek to demonstrate that a proper understanding of the forms, trend and dynamics of corruption would entail an understanding of its material basis, history, emergence, causes and sustenance. How did corruption develop in Nigeria? What circumstances or events flowered it? How does it become indigenised or domesticated, that the nation is now seen as a signpost of corruption? How does corruption breed insecurity?

2) **CORRUPTION**: In the literature, corruption is variously defined. It is the misuse of public office for private gain (Sandholtz & Taagepera 2005:109, World Bank, 2000). Corruption is broadly seen as fraudulent, dishonest, illegal behaviour particularly of those in authority positions. Any official conduct that is enacted or obtained at the price of a
fee, payment in cash or kind, that is against the standards, rules, values and expectation of a society is considered as corruption. Corruption is value laden, which includes immorality, moral debasement and depravity. (Ade, Babatunde & Awoniyi, 2011). Similarly, Gould (1991) sees corruption as an immoral and unethical phenomenon that contains a set of moral aberrations from moral standards of society, causing loss of respect for, and confidence in duly constituted authority. To Otite (2000), corruption is the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. It takes place in the process of interaction between two or more parties which changes the structure or process of society or the behaviour of functionaries towards predetermined end. It involves bribery, treasury looting, rule bending to favour, cronies, clans, friends, while harming foes and other perceived enemies (Otite cited in Keeper 2012). Corruption indeed is characterised by a colossal dearth of regard for laws, order, accountability and good conscience (Otite, cited in Keeper 2012). From the array of definition, it is clear that corruption manifests in different forms, and could be found in the social, legal, economic, educational and political realms, and also public and private spheres. Therefore, corruption is not necessarily an isolated event or an individual problem, as it is an outcome of a country’s political and legal aspects, economic and structural policies, the role of institutions, human development, globalisation (Seleim and Bontis 2009) and its specific cultural configuration (we shall come to this later). Corruption is therefore viewed in our context as a cancerous ailment, a socio-political, economic, religious and moral disease that spreads to all the different levels of society (See Aluko, 2002:394). There is the need to deconstruct corruption, understand its origin, and scope if efforts towards its control, or regulation could be successfully prosecuted.

3) INSECURITY: To avoid conceptual fuzziness, it is best to approach the idea of insecurity from the point of unveiling what security entails. As a concept, security involves many aspects and forms. But, we limit our interest to the protection of lives, wellbeing of the people and their prosperity. In this content therefore, security connotes and denotes protection from danger, or other bad situations (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English). Ezeoha, (cited in Okpaga, Ugwu & Eme, 2012:78) contends that security refers to the stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of relationships, feeling safe and belonging to a social group. Generally speaking, the term security, just like peace, is a contested concept. It is seen largely as a condition or feeling safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection and preservation of core values, and the absence of threats to acquire these values (Francis, 2005:23). Security has now evolved from its traditional military origin to include “non-military dimension such as environment, migration, ethno-religious and nationalist identities, poverty and human insecurity, and disease (Francis, 2006:23). Security would therefore encompass all the necessary conditions that guarantee peace, Justice and good health. Arising from this is the notion of insecurity which has plagued the country and its citizens. The feelings of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, poverty, injustice, unemployment are all symptomatic of insecurity. Historically, protection of life and property was the raison d’être of the evolution of civil society generally, and the state in particular. How well this role has been played by the state given the onslaught of rampaging corruption and erosion of values shall be interrogated.
INTERFACE BETWEEN SOCIAL VALUES, CORRUPTION AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

Culture “consists of orientation to actions or general disposition to cut in certain ways in sets of situations” (Sandholtz & Taagepera 2005:111). Through processes of socialisation, people learn about social norms and expectations regarding acceptable behaviour, and acquire orientation to action (see Eckstein 1989 cited in Sandholtz & Taagepera 2005:111). Corruption is not an inherited property, it is learned. In this vein, Odinkalu’s (2010) attempt to disparage Kuffour’s submission in a lecture in 2009 that seeks to relate corruption to culture may be misleading, an unnecessary affront and undermining the primacy and dynamics of culture, and its varied manifestations. The fact that African Societies of old had “firm provisions against stealing, conversion or plunder of public resources for private gain, all elements implicit in the modern manifestations of corruption in governance (Odinkalu, 2010:pp15 – 16) does not in itself mean that the same standards of morality subsist today. Indeed, as we shall soon demonstrate, the reverse is the case as African Societies today embrace corruption. The attempt by Odinkalu to also disaggregate the state from the cultural is simply tenuous and futile.

Nevertheless, to understand the peculiarities of the problem, we need to be guided by the Igbo proverb which admonished “that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body” (see Achebe, 2012). The manner of sharing, or more appropriately, allocating traditional African Societies to European Imperialists after the famous scramble for Africa has been very well documented in the literature (see Ake, 2001), and the consequences of this on the character of societies that emerged are also well known that they do not need repeating here. Suffice it however to say that there has been what may be diagnosed as many false starts in Africa since 1960s when most African states became politically independent (Joseph, 1999). African societies have been taken over forcefully, brought under one administrative control with its challenges and difficulties. The colonial state, driven by the agenda of capital was totalitarian, and had absolute powers which it deployed in a most arbitrary manner to maintain its hegemonic control, and rein in dissenting voices (see Ake, 2001). Similarly, post-colonial state owing largely to some mercantile interests assumed the awesome and arbitrary character of the ancient colonial regime, had also continued to have problems of legitimacy, and are thus ravaged by the internal contradictions of the African political economy (see Egwu, 2005:418 – 419). Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is most brazen in Nigeria given its political economy. The state in the light of these contradictions has become a wealth mine, where the personnel that control the state apparatuses help themselves to the societal resources without attracting condemnation or opprobrium. Since colonisation, the state has played a central role in the organisation of economic reproduction and the allocation of values. Who you are and what role you play in society is a function of your relationship to the state as a means of production and source of wealth. Nigeria’s case is made worse by it’s rentier character that makes it susceptible to corruption, leaving off illegal commissions /thefts from oil proceeds. The prebendal and neo-patrimonial character of the post colonial state makes it incapable of attracting legitimacy to perform its duties and responsibilities (Egwu 2005). In such a situation of state crisis or failure, corruption flourishes (see John, 2008). In this situation, corruption was institutionalised and has been the norm rather than the exception. Corruption is therefore embedded in society (Helman and Ndumbara, 2002:2).
Literature on Nigeria is replete with patron networks, with its differential, unequal and skewed allocation of values. These patronage networks support the value of appropriating resources from the state to further the collective interests of the family, clan, ethnic group, region or religion. Corruption has become part and parcel of daily life and is tolerated, accepted and institutionalised to the extent that both people who give and receive bribes have internalised that behaviour (see Helman & Ndumbaro 2002:2). The distinction made by Helman & Ndumbaro (2002) in separating individual and systemic corruption is useful, at least in Nigeria, as it underscores the reality of corruption as a political, economic and social process that has strong support from within the social networks that the individual belongs. That is why perhaps the anti-corruption drive in Nigeria has been largely cosmetic. In corrupt endemic societies, corrupt practises usually are reproduced by the extant power relation, where occupants of state power and bureaucrats use state resources to advance the interests of family, friends, clan and horde of sycophants. These stolen wealth are used to feed social support networks, to take care of the needs of close relations and interest groups no matter how bizarre (see Bayart 1993, Ekeh, 1998, Joseph 1998). Sometimes, weddings/burials are bankrolled, even chieftaincy titles. The more frugal, use the slosh fund to start up businesses for their kith and kin. Does it therefore surprise anyone why in Nigeria, the talk about allocation, consumption, not production top the priority list of public office holders? Sharing the national cake is always on the agenda of national discourse. Nigerians’ attitude to the national cake may be because it is largely dependent on proceeds collected from oil, not from people’s taxes. This generates a rent seeking behaviour with its tokenistic characteristic culminating in unprecedented waste and profligacy under the military.

It was such profligacy reinforced by other global economic realities (the oil doom) that necessitated the introduction of Austerity measures and the Structural Adjustment Programme (see Ihonbere and Ekekwe, 1988) which Nigeria is still smarting from. The devaluation of the currency, the lack, and/or high cost of essential commodities, the massive retrenchment in the public service, the rising unemployment, shut down of several factories, the increasing poverty are all symptomatic of the new measures of economic recovery – Structural Adjustment Programme. Under such a scenario of chaos and confusion, a season of anomie when the goals of society are unrealisable through the means, corrupt – prone behaviour become the norm. The anomie theory following Merton sees corruption (deviant behaviour) as emanating from the social structure of the society, which exerts a definite pressure upon certain individuals in the society to engage in non conforming of conforming conduct (Alaanamu, 2009:36). The social nature of corruption is also best highlighted by Edwin Sutherland’s Differential Association theory, where corrupt behaviour is learned in association with others (see Brytting, Minoque and Morino, 2012). The emphasis on material success, the stamp of social arrival, the craze for the acquisition of material identity are the ultimate goals in Nigeria. Money is the language, and practice of social interaction. The divide between the societal goal and the means of realising this goal is at the centre of all forms of corruption. (See Lee, 1986, Akerloft and Yellen, 1990) The pressure from kindred communities, families and clan, the success of those who have flouted the rules and become heroes, men of wealth may have provided the impetus for corruption in Nigeria (see Obuah, 2010).

The fraud triangle so clearly illustrates the influence of the social milieu on the predilection to be corrupt. Here, corruption which is not distinct from fraud is treated as an overlap between need, opportunity and rationalisation (see Brytting, Minoque and Morino
2012:49). A perceived need is a prerequisite, or necessary condition for fraud, for instance, one’s need for money may become compelling that he seizes the advantage of any opportunity that presents itself to realise his agenda. However, he does this in the light of others that exercise some influence over him who are the “significant” or “relevant others”. “A potential fraudster will perceive an opportunity when he believes he can commit a fraud with either an acceptably small risk of getting caught, or an acceptably low risk of punishment if caught” (Brytting, Minogue & Morino 2012:50). Related to the above is the issue of rationalisation referring to the general tendencies to explain, or justify corrupt practices, particularly when these are in tandem with the societies sub cultural groups. “This is the way it is done, or everyone is doing it, or I am not alone mentality”. The fraud triangle is a heuristic, or analytic tool to indicate the place of cultural values in sustaining corrupt tendencies.

The ubiquity of corruption in Nigeria makes pedestrian the attempt to document the different forms of corruption. There are no holy sites, or reserved areas. The Nigerian public service is a haven for corruption. Every aspect of the nation’s life is affected. Dividends of democracy are nothing but dividends of corruption. It may not be an exaggeration to say that public services are provided (if at all) at illegal fees, bribes etc. Official duties are performed only in exchange for gifts, cash or kind. Nigeria’s Corruption Perception Index released annually by Transparency International shows vividly that it is still the nation’s major disease, in spite of the spirited efforts of Anti-corruption Agencies (Transparency International 2010). Aluko’s (2009:5) attempt to identify nine forms of corruption which include – a) Political b) Bureaucratic c) Electoral d) Bribery e) Fraud f) Embezzlement g) favouritism h) Nepotism – may be a distinction without a difference. What should be central is that corruption, wherever it manifests and how, is antithetical to the public good and is destructive of the entire society. Nevertheless, the profile of corruption as documented by the African charter on preventing and combating corruption and related offences include

a) The solicitation or acceptance directly or indirectly by a public official, or any other person, of any goods of monetary, or other benefit, such as a gift, favour, promise or advantage for himself or herself or for another person or entity, in exchange for any act or omission in the performance, of his or her public functions;

b) The offering or granting, directly or indirectly to a public official or any other person of any goods of monetary value, or other benefit, such as a gift, favour, promise or advantage... in exchange for any act or omission in the performance of his/her public functions;

c) The offering or granting, directly or indirectly, to a public official or any other person for the purpose of illicitly obtaining benefits for himself or herself or for a third party;

d) The diversion by a public official or any other person, for purposes unrelated to that for which they were intended, for his or her own benefit or that of a third party...

e) Offering, giving, promising, soliciting or acceptance of any undue advantage to or by any person... in breach of his/her duties;

f) The offering, giving, soliciting or accepting directly or indirectly, of any undue advantage to, or, by any person who assents or confirms that he/she is able to exert any improper influence over the decision making of any person performing functions in the public or private sector in consideration thereof...

g) Illicit enrichment

h) The use of concealment of proceeds from any of the acts referred to in this article, and
i) Participation as a principal, co-principal, agent, instigator, accomplice or accessory after the fact or in any other manner in commission or attempted commission of, in any collaboration, in conspiracy to commit any of the acts..... (see Egweni, 2012; pp77 – 76)

As stated above, it is clear that the law does not take into consideration the cultural practices of most Nigerian societies in terms of how favours are appreciated. As it is, there may be problems of implementation in the light of its all-encompassing and inclusive nature that stigmatises almost all Nigerians. Corruption is pervasive. The endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria has left the country in ruins, socially, politically, morally and economically (Ogunsiyi, 2010; Odinkalu, 2010, Obuah, 2010). The space of insecurity in the nation is also traceable to corruption and floundering values. The Niger Delta imbroglio largely resulted from corruption which led to desperation, unemployment, frustration and militancy (see Ibeanu, 2008). The comprehensive criminalisation of the state (see Bayart, 1993) so evident in myriad cases of corruption has great consequences on deepening conflict, and fostering a siege of terror in the land. The Nigerian masses witness daily the discrepancy between their deteriorating social and material conditions, and the corruption and conspicuous consumption of the political class (Nnonyelu, 2012).

Tedd Gurr’s (1970) seminal thesis on relative deprivation brings this out clearly when he submitted that men and women compare their fortunes with those of their neighbours, and significant others, and if they feel that their situation or condition are inequitable, they will attack their perceived enemies or those they feel are responsible for their immiseration. Relative deprivation as fuelled by corruption is a major cause of insecurity. Violent crimes as we witness in Nigeria today like armed robbery, murder, political assassinations, kidnapping for a fee, Boko Haram terrorism are, of course, not unrelated to corruption or its multiplier effects. The residents of Maitama, Ikoyi may not rest “closing their two eyes” if the squatters in Ojuelegba, Ajegunle, Nyanya etc are restless. The army of thugs sponsored by god fathers, the sea of “Amajiri” and “Area Boys” or “Agberos” which swell the ranks of ethno-sectarian militias are illustrative of the relationship between a corrupt-ridden society and one that is violence infested. Both of them complement the other. Corruption and insecurity are in fact, two sides of one coin. It is plausible that the changed status of former Warlords in the Niger Delta (Some have become emergency billionaires) may be an incentive for the prolongation of the Boko Haram insurgency. Currently, there is news about amnesty for the Boko Haram militants. In a rogue state characterised by massive corruption, governance by ordeal, impunity, even the absurd, becomes the norm.

IS THERE A WAY OUT?

Current efforts at stamping out corruption in Nigeria have been encouraging. Of particular mention is the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established by the EFCC act of 2002, as amended in the EFCC Act of 2003 with broad powers to coordinate the various institutions involved in the fight against money laundering and enforcement of all laws dealing with economic and financial crimes and terrorism (see Obuah, 2010:41). Other agencies involved in the fight against corruption include the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) etc. The EFCC has made modest contributions, but, the ubiquity of corruption, the modus operandi of EFCC, the political Economy of the Nigerian State, entail a paradigm shift, both in methodology and orientation. The current practice which looks at corruption from the individual perspective generally misses the point. That is why the efforts have been cosmetic, artificial, mythical and not realistic. The problem which we consider
germane is the seriousness or honesty of the nation’s leaders to rid the society of corruption. Can
the nation truly expect the petty bourgeois faction of the Nigerian governing class to carry out an
altruistic war against corruption? Those who go to equity, as the lawyers would say, must go
with clean hands. How clean are the hands of our leaders? Given the manner in which political
contest has degenerated in Nigeria, and how leaders are (s) elected, it becomes difficult for the
ruling class in Nigeria to support any genuine anti-corruption drive. Doing so will tantamount to
suicide of a ruling faction of the governing class. The settlement of the press, the absence of a
virile civil society, the acquiescence of labour and other progressive groups to corrupt
tendencies, make fighting corruption in Nigeria a hollow ritual, and an impossible task.

CONCLUSION

Today, Nigerians are more corrupt than they were several years ago, or better still, corruption has
been effectively democratised. While not disparaging the courageous efforts of the Anti-
Corruption personnel, we need to deconstruct the term corruption to see it as a social problem, or
a “process in socio-economic and political development that is more than a problem of individual
morality or market imperfections (Helman & Ndumbaro, 2002:15). Corruption grows out of the
constellation of social values and the power relations or material basis that underpin them.
Understanding the war on corruption in Nigeria would require concentrated attention be given to
power relations, morals, values, ethics and material conditions that uphold them (Helman &
Ndumbaro, 2002). Goodluck Jonathan’s Transformation Agenda would commence with a
wholesale transformation, radical reorientation of social values, and state institutions that have
been the bulwark of corruption. The current levels of poverty (relative and absolute) need to be
addressed with massive enlightenment programme to check the menace. Corruption would
become further entrenched, deeply embedded if the nation continues on the same old road.

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