

Obasanjo Wanted Third Term at All Cost-Elrufai - Naija Pundit

Written by Alaba Johnson

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Former president Olusegun Obasanjo has literally declared war on one of his cronies and former Federal Capital Territory (FCT) minister, Mallam Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai, over what he said about him in his memoir which will be presented to the public today, even as his “boys” vowed to boycott the presentation of the book today.

According to the controversial former minister, now a chieftain of the opposition Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), Obasanjo wanted a third term at all cost despite the warning of the duo of senators David Mark and Tunde Ogbeha, his points-men in the Senate. El-Rufai also portrays Obasanjo as an unreliable, undependable, greedy, power seeker.

But speaking to our correspondent under anonymity, a former minister who served in the same Obasanjo cabinet yesterday disclosed Obasanjo’s disappointment in el-Rufai and said the former president had drawn a battle line with him. Obasanjo’s loyalists would not honour their colleague’s invitation today, he said.

The minister said, “What Nasir wrote about Baba (Obasanjo) was done in bad faith. He threw caution to the wind, he really ridiculed him and this is not fair. Baba is angry and he has told some of us that el-Rufai is walking on a path angels could not run. I have read the book, it does not paint Baba well at all. I wonder what came over our friend while writing the manuscript.

“What we are suspecting was the refusal of Baba to endorse Nasir as recommended by the economic team and he was not happy about it. It was our dream that a member of the economic team should succeed Baba in order to avoid a situation where the foreign reserves would be

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depleted as we are witnessing today, but President Obasanjo thought otherwise and we all worked for the candidature of the late Umaru Yar A'dua which we are all regretting today including Baba.

But for Nasir to write such crap about the former president whom we all have tremendous respect for despite his shortcomings is disappointing," the source said.

Speaking further, the former minister said although the author singled out a former minister of education, Oby Ezekwesili, for praise: "I doubt it if Oby would go to the programme where Baba would be the object of ridicule. I know Nuhu (Ribadu) would not go, Femi (Fani-Kayode) would not, Uba Sani would not move closer to that place, and I would be surprised if Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala would be there. This is what Nasir has caused and someone like me would not be there. Hear someone abusing Baba and I would keep quiet? Never. So, it is better we leave Nasir and his new friends to do their thing."

El-Rufai, in the book, discloses how Obasanjo laboured in vain to remove term limit from the 1999 Constitution using his foot soldiers in the National Assembly like Senator Mark (now the Senate president) and Senator Ogbeha. According to him, if Obasanjo had listened to the two, the shame and disgrace suffered on the floor of the Senate would have been avoided.

Obasanjo's last day in power – el-Rufai

Even on the eve of the inauguration of Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as new president, outgoing president Olusegun Obasanjo and some members of his inner cabinet were still engaged in a war of wits over what they felt were Obasanjo's 'huge mistakes in his presidency'.

Former minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mallam Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai, in his book, *The Accidental Public Servant*, presents a vivid account of Obasanjo's last night in power, where he was invited to a meeting in the Aso Rock presidential villa by the former chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, with Obasanjo.

El-Rufai recounts on page 362 that when he arrived the venue of the meeting, he heard Obasanjo and Ribadu shouting at each other.

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“When I arrived there, I could hear them shouting at each other the moment I got out of my car. ‘You are wrong! We will recover them!’ Nuhu said. He was banging the table. I entered the room and all of a sudden they both went silent.”

El-Rufai says that after that meeting he had left with Ribadu who alluded to the conversation he was having with Obasanjo before he intruded. According to him, the former president made four huge mistakes in his presidency.

On page 363 of the book, the former minister writes: “Many of us felt that Obasanjo made four huge mistakes in his presidency.

The first was that Obasanjo had borrowed money to purchase shares in Transcorp, a company known to have plans to acquire certain government assets. The shares were offered to many government officials. Atiku Abubakar was offered, Ngozi (Okonjo-Iweala) was offered. I dissuaded both of them from taking up the offer because they were the chair and vice chair of the Privatisation Council respectively.

“This Transcorp share acquisition made Nuhu very angry and this was what he was arguing about with Obasanjo when I arrived that night, as well as the other three mistakes of Obasanjo’s presidency: the third term effort which we all thought was a blemish for us as an administration, the fundraising for the Obasanjo Presidential Library while he was still in office, and the mistake of handing power to persons who had no idea or any experience in running the federal government.”

Besides this meeting, el-Rufai also recalls in the 627-page book that, on that night of May 28, 2007, they had gone to the guest house where Yar’Adua was staying to put finishing touches to the inaugural speech.

“Up to that point, Yar’Adua was consulting me, virtually every day, on things in general and also on his inaugural speech. To Yar’Adua’s credit, he delivered a speech that called the very elections that brought him to power ‘flawed’. We finally convinced him to accept this, then follow it up with a pledge to set up a high-powered commission so that we learnt from the mistakes. We adjourned at about two in the morning.”