

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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MEMORANDUM

NIGERIA: POLITICAL TRENDS

Key Judgments

Disquieting political trends are becoming more evident as Nigeria approaches its planned return to civilian rule in October 1979. The turnover may yet go smoothly, but for the present these trends make for a more guarded view of prospects for a peaceful transition and successful new regime.

- ° Political parties, given only three months to organize openly on a national basis before applications for recognition are due in mid-December, are developing along much the same regional lines that undermined the first republic.*
- ° Regional divisions seem so sharp that no presidential candidate now in sight is likely to receive the nationwide support required in the first stage of the elections.*
- ° These divisions could lead to communal violence.*



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- *Signs of Arab involvement and intra-Muslim divisions in northern Nigeria bear watching.*
- *The situation may soon test the unity and resolve of Nigeria's current military rulers to proceed with the transfer of power.*

Overview

Nigeria's civilian politicians are rushing to complete the formation of political parties, selection of presidential candidates, and cementing of alliances necessary to meet an 18 December registration deadline for applying for the status of recognized national parties. The requirement for nationally oriented, broadly based parties is viewed by the military as a key feature of Nigeria's new constitution, one that is intended to enhance unity and a more national outlook in future political activity in this highly variegated country.

The political scene remains in considerable flux, and in the time left for maneuvering some major realignments that may result in an awkward succession of musical chair alliances are still possible. The most disturbing development has been the breakup along regional lines of the most nationally appearing of the three emergent parties--the north-south amalgam known as the Nigerian People's Party. The political contest now seems to be shaping up as a regional confrontation between one major northern Muslim-oriented party and two opposing parties splitting the south's vote between its two large and traditionally antagonistic ethnic groups.

Since the formal ban on politics was removed on 21 September, Nigerian politicians will--by 18 December--have been allowed only 13 weeks to put together national parties and leadership slates. After a hiatus of 12 years of military rule, the regime may well be trying to compress too much political development into too short a time to realistically expect that a viable political structure will be in place when civilians are scheduled to assume power in October 1979.

The ruling military council may have instructed the federal electoral commission to set the short deadline for party registration in an effort to force order on the chaotic party scene in preparation for a series of elections scheduled to begin next spring. The effect is to limit dramatically the time for political sorting out and to crystalize prematurely the organization of political parties. Some of the major parties that emerge under such circumstances are likely to be plagued by internal squabbling, shaky organization, and defections. All of this does not make for an auspicious beginning for a return to party-based civilian government.

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More serious for the future is that Nigerian parties appear to be emerging along many of the same regional and ethnic lines that fueled bitter competition and undermined stability during the first republic. The splits between the main groups now on the scene are reminiscent of the three-way regional-ethnic division that existed in the early 1960s between the Hausa-Fulani in the Muslim north, the Christian and Muslim Yoruba in the southwest, and the predominantly Christian Ibo in the southeast. Moreover, these parties also have many of the same old cast of characters in leadership positions. What is remarkable is that so few aspects of Nigeria's political makeup may have been transformed for the better under the facade of military rule.

The way political parties are evolving must be a source of some concern, if not a real dilemma, for Nigeria's military rulers unless they are dead set on returning the country to civilian rule and claiming credit for the move. The question of whether or not to register basically regional parties that claim to be national and to proceed with the transition to civilian rule could thus pose a real test of the resolve and unity of the military leadership.

Over the short term, continued political competition between essentially regional parties is likely to enhance prospects for bitter political confrontation and the outbreak of serious communal violence. Unrestrained regional competition would make it all the more difficult for the parties involved to accept the prospect of electoral defeat, which could again raise the specter of threatened secession in Nigeria. If this danger materialized, the regime would be compelled to extend military rule in order to preserve national unity--providing, of course, that it was still in control of the situation. Looking further down the road, renewed regionally based political competition could threaten the survival of any new civilian government and future stability.

We have no indications at this time that the regime may be having second thoughts about the wisdom of proceeding with civilian rule. In assessing the dangers to unity ahead, however, the military leadership could decide at some point to postpone the transfer of power. The regime would have to make a very convincing public case--particularly in

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the absence of communal disorders--that an extension of military rule would be in the country's best interest. Despite some misgivings about what may lie ahead, the civilian elite is eagerly anticipating the passage to civilian rule. The military has always been more tolerated than popular, and many Nigerians blame it for the country's economic failings and their poor living conditions. A delay in the transfer of power would risk anti-government demonstrations and broad social unrest.

Although we have no knowledge of how the officer corps view Nigeria's current political evolution, a coup attempt by disgruntled middle-grade officers--fearful that the country is heading for chaos and that civilian politicians on the scene are incapable of running a future government--is an ever present possibility.

Nigerian People's Party

The breakup of the Nigerian People's Party underscores the difficulties in Nigeria of regional cooperation and building a multi-ethnic party, particularly in the aftermath of the bitter north-south controversy earlier this year over the constitutional proposal for a federal Islamic court of appeals. Both sides in the constituent assembly approached the court issue, which the north lost, not as a religious question, but as a symbolic measure of the political power each region hoped to wield under a civilian rule. The People's Party, heavily southern in makeup from the outset but lacking a nationally known southern vote-getter, was built in large part around a coalition of the forces that defeated the proposed Islamic court.

The party is now split into northern and southern wings, each claiming the party label. The split was precipitated by the political re-emergence of Nnamdi Azikiwe, 74, a well-known southern Ibo politician who had been the ceremonial president of the first republic. Azikiwe in the early 1960s had founded a predominantly Ibo political party that dominated the politics of the former eastern region.

Before Azikiwe's appearance, southern party members had reluctantly supported Waziri Ibrahim, a northern dissident politician who had been neutral on the court issue, as the People's Party candidate for the presidency and the party's best hope to project a national image. They felt, however, that Ibrahim's candidacy would be tantamount--symbolically at least--to a thinly veiled acceptance of northern domination,

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and when Azikiwe declared his availability, the southern members bolted from Ibrahim's ranks. Without them, Ibrahim appears to have no chance of winning the presidency; he has little following in the north.

Azikiwe is projecting himself as an elder statesman concerned with national unity and the regional cast of Nigeria's other parties. Ironically, he has destroyed the one major party that best transcended ethnic and regional lines. The diffident Azikiwe apparently hopes to build a "national" party out of the southern wing of the People's party. This faction, however, seems destined to be little more than another southern-based regional group dependent on building wide support among the now factionalized major Ibo tribe.

Azikiwe cannot expect, as an Ibo, to attract significant votes among Yorubas and Muslim northerners. No Ibo can make a credible presidential candidate because the Ibos are still too tainted by their attempted secession as Biafra in 1967. Azikiwe does have the backing of many minority peoples in southeastern Nigeria; a few of the Yoruba opposed to the presidential candidacy of the major Yoruba politician, Chief Awolowo, and those minority tribesmen from Nigeria's middle belt who are anti-northern. The middle belt is a politically divided, ethnically and religiously mixed buffer zone between the Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south. Middle beltters and non-Ibo easterners, who traditionally have resented Ibo encroachment, are susceptible to wooing by the Muslim north.

The National Party of Nigeria

The National Party represents a major effort by the Muslim north to close ranks in a regional front after the debacle of the Islamic court defeat. It is aimed at re-asserting the control the northern region exercised in the first republic over any future civilian government. The party has experienced serious organizational problems and factional infighting, however, which made for prolonged difficulties in agreeing on a leadership slate. Many of its problems reflect the fact that the solid north of the early 1960s has passed with the creation of 10 states in place of the former single northern administrative region. This

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has broken the hold the large Hausa-Fulani group once had over smaller Muslim ethnic groups and middle-belt tribesmen and has allowed the ethnic and political diversity that had always existed in the north to manifest itself. The impact of modernization and social change, though far less pervasive than in the south, has created sharper generational differences of outlook between the traditional Muslim political establishment and the region's younger "new breed" politicians.

To add to its troubles, the north does not have a nationally recognized presidential candidate to support. Younger and inexperienced northern politicians who represented the region in the constituent assembly battle over the Islamic court issue turned to the establishment for leadership during the subsequent formation of the National Party. Recent reports suggest, however, that serious splits may have developed between the two groups. As a result, the party may end up choosing either a relatively noncontroversial old guard politician as a compromise presidential candidate or a dark horse "new breed" candidate at its convention on 7-10 December. The degree to which younger, more aggressive northerners are in control of the party could have much to do with how confrontational and unyielding an approach the party takes in future politicking. The northern establishment figures, by and large, are temperamentally inclined to favor a more moderate approach.

In the first republic, the Muslim north initially had a modus vivendi with a considerable proportion of the Ibos. If it cannot now reestablish such support, it would appear to southerners as an even more overtly regional vehicle of the north. The party's electoral strategy is based on the fact that the Muslim north with 38 percent of the total electorate has the largest potential bloc of voters. It can also count on a majority of anti-Awolowo Yorubas, many of whom are Muslims, and presumably many voters in the middle belt, which was part of the former northern administrative region.

Without Ibo votes, however, the National Party would face a difficult struggle to win a direct popular victory under the election rules* that exist. It would probably have to pin its hopes for victory on a subsequent runoff

*The winning president must obtain a plurality nationwide and one-quarter of two votes in 13 of 19 states.

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election where federal and state legislators act as an electoral college to choose a president. A northerner could win if northern unity is operative, since the 10 states of the former northern region collectively have more legislative votes than the less populous south.

The Unity Party of Nigeria

Chief Awolowo's Unity party--though the best organized--has the most narrow ethnic cast of the three major parties. It is a reincarnation of the southern Yoruba-based party he led in the early 1960s. Awolowo seems to have very little support among other ethnic groups, and the party's wings in non-Yoruba areas--which give it claim to national status--are largely made up of the sizable Yoruba population in principal urban centers throughout the country. Because of traditional Yoruba political disunity, however, Awolowo probably cannot attract more than a slim majority of the Yoruba vote and would seem to have little chance of becoming Nigeria's next president. This does not mean that he is not a source of worry to the Muslim north and Ibo east.

Awolowo is a nationally known figure who strives to be an elder statesman, but he is widely regarded by other Nigerians as a Yoruba-firster and has a reputation for being inflexible. He is a symbol of that group's presumed quest for national preeminence. The state-oriented distribution of political power has reduced previous Hausa-Fulani domination of politics, and the civil war ended a period of Ibo ascendancy in the civil service and commerce. Yorubas have made inroads in these areas, including the state civil services in the undereducated north. These gains, when accompanied by the aggressiveness of the Yoruba personality, have led in the northern states to an anti-Yoruba feeling which in many areas is stronger than previous anti-Ibo sentiment. Awolowo thus is anathema to the north, and he bitterly divides the south.

Awolowo's less well-organized opponents are nevertheless worried about the possible mass appeal of the avowedly populist welfare campaign he is conducting. He espouses mildly socialist goals and apparently aspires to become the leader and articulator of currently unorganized and incoherent discontent evident among many Nigerian intellectuals, students,

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workers, and farmers. Awolowo is politicking aggressively-- where local campaign regulations permit--with a splashy street-oriented campaign, but with little apparent ground-swell of support. He is the first declared presidential candidate to embark on a national tour; so far, he has visited 72 urban areas and traveled more than 8,000 kilometers.

The Regime--Becoming Politically Involved?

As the political process unfolds, members of the ruling military council are becoming all the more vulnerable to the divisive pulls of ethnic and regional loyalties. Until now, this body has done a remarkable job of maintaining an outward image of unanimity and neutrality toward various political groups. Should real fissures in the facade of unity appear, a return to civilian government could become much more difficult.

There is evidence that some key northern council members have been quietly trying to help the National Party overcome its lack of leadership and unity, doubtless in hopes of ensuring northern domination of the future government. Head of State General Obasanjo, a southerner, perhaps feeling he is not in a political position to interfere, continues to project the image of a statesman above partisan politics. There have been allegations--so far unconfirmed--that Obasanjo and some other southern Yoruba council members are privately sympathetic to the presidential aspirations of fellow tribesman Chief Awolowo. They supposedly view Awolowo as Nigeria's most experienced politician and the one most capable of administering the country and managing its precarious finances.

Islamic Divisions and Foreign Involvement in the North

The greatest unknown as the country marches along toward civilian rule is what impact intra-Muslim religious divisions and purported Libyan involvement may be having on political development and attitudes in the north. These forces would have implications for the entire country should they cause northerners to take an even more confrontational approach to politics and make religion a more openly political issue than before. They would seriously jeopardize a harmonious transition to civilian rule by forcing to the surface the dangerous ethnic, regional, and religious antipathies that lurk just below the surface of Nigerian society.

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[REDACTED] Kano City in the Muslim north is one of the areas in Nigeria where serious violence is most likely to erupt. Kano City is a centuries-old commercial and religious center and the capital of Kano state. Rapid population growth--along with chronic social, ethnic, and religious tensions that are compounded by the presence of numerous resident Libyans, other Arabs, and non-Muslim southerners--all make for a potentially volatile mix. Symptomatic of tensions are so far unconfirmed rumors of foreign arms shipments to the city.

Kano City is the seat of the Tijaniyya Islamic sect, now the largest in northern Nigeria with adherents drawn primarily from younger Muslims. The Tijaniyya reportedly are more puritanical in outlook than are the Qadiriyya, the next largest sect, to which all the north's conservative traditional leaders outside Kano belong. In recent years, religious feelings in Kano have occasionally led to intra-Muslim violence and to near violence between Muslims and Christians.

Religious rivalries in Kano City may partly underlie the competition there between the major National Party and its splinter group, People's Redemption Party. Establishment members have lined up behind the former, while the latter draws its support from younger, more radical northern elements, and possibly the more religiously extreme Tijaniyya. The Redemption Party also has the support of some northern leftists and socialists.

The Redemption Party probably cannot now qualify for registration as a national party, but it could assume far greater importance were it to attract frustrated "new breed" politicians from the major National Party. The party is led by 57-year-old Aminu Kano, of Kano City. His party may be nothing more than a reincarnation of the minor radical party he founded in the early 1960s, then as now in protest against the conservative, right-wing cast of the major northern party. The liberal ideas of Aminu Kano and those of others in the group would seem to be at variance with any political impulse toward Islamic traditionalism. The party also includes some southern Ibo progressives, who almost certainly would not remain were that group religiously virulent.

There are a number of indications that Libya is playing an active role in northern politics--though the specifics are murky--with the aim of helping to ensure that a Muslim-oriented civilian government emerges in 1979. It seems clear that Libyan money is going to certain Muslim politicians in both the major National Party and its offshoot, the People's Redemption Party. We do not know if one party is being favored over the other or to what degree communal tensions in Kano state and elsewhere in the north can be ascribed to possible Libyan machinations. The Redemption Party could be an enticing target of opportunity for the Libyans, particularly if the National Party cannot pull itself together or if the Redemption party does prove to be a religiously extreme grouping.



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The Enduring Problem of Political Violence

There have been several minor incidents of violence since the resumption of legal political activity last September. Political violence has a long history in Nigerian politics, but has not yet become the center-stage problem that it was during the country's post-independence experiment with civilian rule. How successfully Nigeria can control violence in the future will be an important measure of the chances for a peaceful and successful transition to civilian rule.

In October, each major party experienced some violence. A National Party meeting in Niger state was interrupted by a rival faction of the party and a riot ensued. A rally in Borno state organized by People's Party figure Waziri Ibrahim was disrupted by National Party thugs, and a campaign stop in Anambra state by Unity Party leader Chief Awolowo was disrupted by thugs. No deaths were reported in any of these incidents.

Kano state in the north took the lead in trying to forestall political violence and inflammatory politicking by placing strict restraints on campaigning in that state. Other states in various parts of the country have followed suit. According to an official of the federal electoral commission, state authorities and police have the primary responsibility for maintaining public order during Nigeria's transition to civilian rule. Widespread violence, however, almost certainly would compel the federal government and army to step in.

Political violence precipitated by party thugs resulted in the death of at least 2,000 people and the breakdown of public order in the former Western region in 1964-65, which in turn contributed to the military's takeover in 1966. Politicians, both old and new, display a remarkable capacity to forget such lessons from the past, in spite of frequent rhetorical exhortations to each other to recall them. More often than not, they continue to display a penchant for an unrestrained style of confrontational politics in which tolerance and compromise is defined as the other side giving in to their wishes.

Money and Nigerian Politics

In Nigerian politics money has considerable symbolic connotations. To the mass of Nigeria's impoverished and largely illiterate voters, the expenditure of substantial amounts of money by a politician is symbolic proof that he is an important man. Lavish political spending is already evident. Though it is difficult to document, the money comes from a variety of sources--including foreign governments and companies, wealthy Nigerian entrepreneurs, and the personal fortunes of Nigerian politicians. It is used notably for publicity purposes, but also to cement alliances, buy votes, and hire political thugs. Politicians even attempt to buy a presence in unfriendly ethnic areas, if only to try to meet requirements that to be registered, a political party must demonstrate some strength and organization in all the country's 19 states.

Rumors are circulating about foreign money and influence in support of the various major parties on the scene. As the pace of campaigning quickens, advantage-seeking politicians

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are sure to publicize these rumors and use them against one another. Despite a strong warning last September by Head of State General Obasanjo against foreign interference in Nigerian politics, there is little doubt that--as in the past--foreign money is entering Nigeria and Nigerian politicians are opportunistically taking it.

Officials of the federal electoral commission have taken a position that foreign money is a problem for Nigeria's security service to investigate. Determined action can come only from the ruling military council, but its own delicate ethnic and regional balance forces cause it to tread very carefully. As a southerner, for example, Head of State General Obasanjo must proceed diplomatically in pressing his concern over signs of Libyan involvement in northern politics. There is the possibility that some influential northern colleagues in the government might be sympathetic to such Libyan involvement. Also, the security organization is headed by a northerner who might be reluctant to investigate vigorously fellow northerners.

In addition to Arab funds entering Nigeria, it can be assumed that the Soviets are providing some money to favorite Nigerian socialist politicians. Nigerian socialists are trying to work out a merger of the three socialist parties now existing. The ideological splits and personal rivalries involved, however, militate against such a merger. The groups will have to align themselves with major parties or become pressure groups.

Some major party presidential candidates are wealthy enough in their own right to fund a good part of their political activities. Chief Awolowo of the Unity Party, a well-to-do lawyer, has considerable funds which enemies claim he stole from the Nigerian central bank when he served as finance minister during the Nigerian civil war. Waziri Ibrahim of the Nigerian People's Party has substantial financial resources and a multitude of business interests that he began to acquire in the 1960s, first as minister of economic development in the original civilian regime, and later as Nigeria's chief arms merchant in Europe during the civil war.

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Nigeria: Federal States, Tribal Groups, and Islam



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