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Nigeria and the Congo: Implications for Black Africa

6 November 1967
No. 9-67

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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SUBJECT: Nigeria and the Congo: Implications for Black Africa

The bloody civil war in Nigeria and the racial and security crises associated with the mercenary revolt in Congo (Kinshasa) have caused some African and foreign observers to express fears that comparable troubles are likely to be prevalent throughout black Africa. Certainly these crises lay bare fundamental problems of tribal antagonisms and administrative and military disabilities that are present nearly everywhere in black Africa. In most states, however, these problems are not as intense as in Nigeria and the Congo, and the threats to national unity and order are not now as acute. Thus, though political instability and economic malaise will continue to be widespread over the next couple of years, we believe that fragmentation of states, civil wars, and racial crises will be the exception rather than the rule.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The crises of the past year indicate that Nigeria and Congo (Kinshasa) are fumbling badly their attempts at nation building. Like nearly all other newly independent African states,

Nigeria and the Congo are "colonial creations:" their boundaries were determined by political claims and military conquest, with more consideration given to administrative convenience and commercial prospects than to lines of tribal demarcation. Preservation of national unity has proven particularly difficult for Nigeria and the Congo because their populations are larger and more diverse than those of other new black African states, and because the political institutions and instruments of control each inherited with independence were inadequate to cope with the political and economic problems posed by their size and diversity.

II. THE NIGERIAN CRISIS

2. The sticking point in Nigeria has been the incapacity of the political system to accommodate the strongly-held tribal identities of the population, or to reconcile the bitter antagonisms engendered by the growing contacts among the diverse tribal and regional groupings within the country. Under colonial rule and even after independence (1960), few Nigerians developed much sense of national consciousness to replace or supplement the

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comfortable assurance of tribal membership.* Indeed, increased

contacts among tribes in the rapidly expanding urban areas of

Nigeria generally reinforced tribal allegiances and intensified

tribal rivalries. Tribal identity, taken for granted in the

villages, took on greater meaning for the colonies of "foreign"

Ibos in northern Nigerian cities and of "foreign" Hausas in

Lagos. The uprooted strangers tended to live apart and to follow

their own customs and traditional beliefs. The generally better-

educated Ibos from Eastern Nigeria filled most of the better jobs

in government and the public services and dominated commercial

life in much of the country. They displayed condescending atti-

tudes toward the more tradition-bound Hausa-Fulani of the North,

and the more relaxed Yorubas of Western Nigeria. Most non-Ibos

in turn developed considerable antipathy toward the pushy clan-

nish easterners, ranging from Yoruba resentment of the Ibo

superiority complex to the Hausa view of Ibos as "slave material."

3. The founding fathers, both British and African, fore-

seeing some of the obstacles barring the way to Nigerian unity,

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* The British did not form a single administrative unit of present-
day Nigeria until 1914, and the outbreak of World War I delayed
any substantial development of a centralized administration
until the 1920's.

fashioned a federation in which each of the three major tribal groups could dominate a region which embraced its own homeland as well as those of lesser tribes. A major weakness in the arrangement, however, was the parliamentary system of control of the central government. By weight of numbers the northerners were virtually assured of a permanent majority at the center. As the scope and importance of the central government increased, its domination by the conservative Moslem North became intolerable to the more modernized southerners. After efforts to loosen the northern grip by constitutional means failed, Ibo army officers in early 1966 snuffed out the parliamentary system by assassinating key Hausa-Fulani leaders, which led to the establishment of a military regime. A second military coup, this one by northern officers against the Ibo military chief, and a series of bloody massacres of Ibos and other easterners living in the North set the stage for the secession of the Eastern Region as the "Republic of Biafra," and for the subsequent civil war.

4. The massacres and the lack of remorse displayed by the northerners convinced most Ibos that they could not live in any Nigerian state dominated by northerners. The civil war has, if anything, intensified mutual animosities. In recent weeks as the

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tide of battle has turned against them, many Ibos have come to believe that the invading Federal forces are intent upon exterminating them, or reducing them to permanent subjugation. The slaughter of civilians by Federal troops advancing through Ibo settlements in the Mid-West and the East and the bellicose statements of some Federal commanders give new substance to Ibo fears.

5. If, as now seems likely, the Federal forces continue to prevail militarily, they will probably prevent a territorial rupture of Nigeria, but the aggravation of tribal hatreds will further complicate the task of nation building. It is difficult to see how a bitterly resentful Ibo people, now hated more than ever by the northerners, can be reabsorbed into a reconstructed Nigeria. Furthermore, recent events have not provided much basis for establishing tribal or political peace in non-Ibo parts of Nigeria. The plan of the Federal Military Government for establishing a strong central government with 12 subordinate states will be very difficult to implement, even if imposed by military authority. Some of the proposed state boundaries cut through tribal lands, and others bring together in narrow compass traditionally antagonistic tribal groupings. After two years of strife and political vacuum, the modern sector of the economy is

in disarray, lawlessness has increased, and local officials are
unsure of their authority. Finally, there is no political leader
or group in sight which could gain the broad popular acceptance
necessary to carry out a political reconstruction, though various
tribal and regional spokesmen and some northern military command-
ers already are maneuvering to gain control of the postwar central
government.

III. THE CONGO CRISIS

6. The misfortunes, disabilities, and incapacities of the
Congo since independence (1960) make it the epitome of Africa's
difficulties. Other African states suffer similar troubles, but
not all at once, and usually not as acutely. Perhaps the major
obstacle to Congolese nationhood is the government's inability
to administer and provide security to a vast primitive state with
several widely dispersed centers of modern economic activity.
Lubumbashi and Bukavu are both some 900 miles from the capital,
with tenuous transportation and communication links. Heretofore,
most of what has passed for public administration and security,
to say nothing of modern activity in all other sectors, has been
provided by white expertise.

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7. President Mobutu's dilemma is that he feels impelled to demonstrate the Congo's independence and his African nationalism by pushing for greater Congolization; i.e., the elimination of non-African administrators and advisors and the reduction of foreign (mainly Belgian) economic interests. But each major step in that direction places in bolder relief Congolese incapacity for ruling their country, by further sapping governmental efficiency, public security, and economic viability. Mobutu's plan to dismiss the white mercenaries in his army before the OAU chiefs of state met in Kinshasa last September, backfired. The subsequent mutiny revealed again not only the impotence of the Congolese National Army, but its tendency in crises to destroy the public security it is supposed to protect. Typically, Mobutu exacerbated the breakdown in order by permitting a shrill anti-European propaganda campaign.

8. Whatever the final outcome of the difficulties in the eastern Congo resulting from the revolt of the mercenaries, or of the recent incursion of mercenaries from Angola, the prolonged disorders have accelerated the departure of Belgians and other non-Africans from the country to a pace Mobutu probably had not intended. Certainly Belgian public opinion now is weighted

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heavily against continued support for the Congo, and many Belgian business interests in the Congo have either cut back or been forced out. The Belgian government would probably prefer to slash its aid program substantially, but is deterred mainly by the fact that some 30,000 Belgian nationals in the Congo are in a sense hostages. A considerable number of these are likely to stick it out. In some cases the Congo is the only home they know and prospects for equivalent emoluments in Belgium are dim. But it is unlikely that Brussels will again provide much military or juristic personnel, or permit its technical advisors to assume posts outside of a few major cities. These gaps are not likely to be filled as effectively by other foreign sources and inevitably will cause a further decline in public services, especially in the hinterland.

9. Particularly important to the Congo are the 1,000 or so Belgian contract technicians who operate the copper industry of Katanga. Most have no roots in the Congo, and each outburst of anti-Belgian sentiment weakens their willingness to remain. If many or most of them suddenly quit, replacement would be very difficult, and mineral exports, the mainstay of Congolese public revenues, would decline or cease. This would not necessarily

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affect the bulk of the rural Congolese engaged in subsistence farming, but would have a considerable impact on the civil service, the security forces, and all who depend on state salaries. In these circumstances, whether or not the Congo survives as a unified state, it would probably lose much of its remaining modern character.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK AFRICA

10. As Nigeria's bloody struggle drags on, and as the Congo gropes for relief from the racial and security problems associated with its chronic revolts, what are the dangers of a spread of similar crises throughout the continent, either as an immediate spillover of violence from the current crisis, or as an eventual development from like basic weaknesses?

11. It can hardly be denied that tribal frictions and administrative incapacity are hampering nation building throughout black Africa, or that political instability and economic malaise will continue to be widespread. Yet we think the Nigeria and Congo crises will not in the immediate future have profound repercussions in other African countries, if only because the populations of most states, including the troublesome elements,

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are too preoccupied with their own daily worries to pay much
attention to foreign developments. In most states, moreover,
the threats to national unity and order are not now as acute as
in Nigeria and the Congo: populations are smaller and cultural
diversity a lesser problem, tribal antipathies are less intense,
the white presence less irritating, and the hinterlands less
important economically. Thus, even over the next couple of
years, we think that fragmentation of states, civil wars, and
racial crises will be the exception rather than the rule in Africa.

A. Tribalism

12. In the final analysis, each African state will have to
cope in its own fashion with the fundamental problems laid bare
by the Nigerian and Congolese crises. At this stage in African
development, tribal affinities are paramount; nationalism can be
superimposed upon a tribal system, but cannot readily supplant or
suppress it. So far, most African rulers have proved fairly
adroit at balancing tribal influences, largely by bestowing bene-
fits proportionately among tribal claimants. This is not particu-
larly difficult in a state like Tanzania, where no single tribe
predominates and where a charismatic leader commands allegiance
beyond his own tribal base. It is more difficult in Kenya, where

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Kikuyu political dominance is grudgingly accepted by the Luos and others. Here the popular acceptance of Kenyatta as both Kikuyu chief and national leader is the keystone of political stability. It is also difficult in Cameroon, where the large, relatively advanced Bamileke tribe is often at odds with the national political party and the central government and where traditional tribal jealousies are easily aroused. President Ahidjo's firm hold on power and his judicious application of rewards and punishments maintains internal peace.

13. We cannot foresee whether the leaders of the new states can continue to manipulate divergent tribal aspirations and eventually weld them into national goals. Certainly, tribal rivalries will slow progress in some cases and upset stability in others. The passing from the scene of the aged Kenyatta, for example, could precipitate a resurgence of tribal tensions which would set back Kenya's political and economic progress, though, even then, we think it unlikely that prolonged violence would ensue.

14. The specter of tribal warfare at this time really haunts only a few African states, i.e., those in which an important tribe believes itself excluded from a reasonable share of the national

benefits. President Obote of Uganda could face a serious internal
crisis if he is unable to win the cooperation for his newly-
imposed centralized government of the large and prosperous Baganda
tribe, the dominant element in the former federal system. Recent
actions by President Massemba-Debat of Congo (Brazzaville) favoring
his own Lari tribal brethren to the detriment of other important
tribes could bring on an internal conflict in that weak caricature
of a Communist state, in which tribal considerations still carry
greater weight than ideology. In Burundi, the Hutu majority may
eventually rise up against the Tutsi ruling class; or the Tutsis,
as in the past, may move to exterminate the Hutu leadership to
prevent such a rising.

15. Elsewhere, insurgencies in Chad, Sudan, and Ethiopia
are variations of this theme. These rebellions have their roots
in ethnic, religious and historic antagonisms. The rebels --
Moslem nomadic tribes in Chad, Christian and pagan negroes in
Sudan, and Moslems in the Eritrean province of Ethiopia -- resent
rule from a distant capital by an "alien" regime. Any meaningful
reconciliation of these long-standing disputes will require
greater leadership skills than now available, and new incentives
toward cooperation.

B. Administrative Deficiencies and Racial Problems

16. Race relations throughout most of black Africa have been surprisingly smooth since independence. Colonial rulers generally retired from the scene gracefully, leaving a residue of white doctors, engineers, teachers, and technical advisors, whose services were needed and welcomed. What was not readily apparent at independence was that persistent African deficiencies in administrative and military skills meant that a considerable, if not an increasing, number of expatriates would be required for a long time. Both the African deficiencies and the administrative and security requirements were most obvious in the Congo. In most of the other states the hinterland has less economic importance and fewer security requirements, and could be safely left to its own devices, while scarce indigenous administrative talent and military force were concentrated in the capital.

17. Yet in nearly all states, foreign experts continue to play a key role in essential services and the modern sector of the economy. Even Ghana, whose Africanization began early and proceeded rapidly, relies upon US Peace Corps volunteers for staffing its secondary schools. In Kenya and Northern Nigeria,

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whites hold half of the senior administrative positions in government; while in most former French colonies the French continue to monopolize education, medicine, finance, and commerce and to fill key posts in civil administration and in the security forces.

18. Popular pressures for Africanization of jobs held by non-Africans are universal but uneven, depending partly upon the flow of students from foreign and domestic universities and technical schools, and partly upon the level of internal frustration and envy of the white man's status. African rulers find it politically hazardous to ignore these pressures, but realize that to capitulate to them could bring a drastic decline of efficiency or security. In practice most leaders have been able to accommodate domestic demands for jobs through gradual Africanization, without seriously disrupting the functioning of the state and economy, as has happened in the Congo.

19. Most African rulers have also been able thus far to avoid the xenophobia of the Congo, partly because, unlike Mobutu, they do not feel threatened by the white presence, or humiliated by continued dependence upon white expertise. Zambia may prove to be another exception. Antiwhite feelings are not far beneath the surface and a large body of expatriates hold the most essential

jobs in the copper industry, the railroads, and other public
services, and retain some high administrative and military posts.
Moreover, if Zambia is to follow its national development plan,
an even greater number of whites will be required for professional
and technical jobs in the next few years. Yet pressures for
Africanization of jobs, regardless of qualifications, are likely
to rise, as frustrations over Rhodesia and envy of the whites in
Zambia increase.

20. Similar pressures exist in East Africa against the large
Asian communities, which dominate retail trade and hold many
middle posts in the bureaucracy. Thus far national leaders
have been able to pace the rate of Africanization of positions
held by Asians and to avoid major racial conflicts, but only by
forcing more and more Asians to emigrate. This involves some
costs to the economy, as the Asians take their skills and capital
funds with them.

21. For black Africa as a whole, we cannot judge whether
the rate of training of Africans in the multiplicity of skills
required to manage even a modest twentieth century state and
economy will provide the necessary indigenous cadres before
popular impatience manifests itself in xenophobic pressures.

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Indeed, the very process of modernization will generate new social tensions which judicious policies of Africanization alone will not alleviate. Conditions which nourish political and economic instability are certain to persist, and in some cases, accompanying racial tensions may make the presence of whites insecure. Nonetheless, the white man will probably be welcomed in most of Africa for a long time.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

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